FLOURISH: CONCEPTS, COMMANDS, AND CONVERSATIONS FOR COMMON GOOD FAITH AND POLITICS IN THE CHURCH

A THESIS-PROJECT

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BY

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To Cornerstone, my children, and my Dad.

May you know Jesus in all things.

Even politics.

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In Christ,

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig

ABSTRACT

The mission of the church is to make whole-life disciples, even in politics. Pastors and churches have a pastoral opportunity to do political discipleship. In this thesis-project, I hypothesized that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good would give Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics. To test this hypothesis, I taught a ten-week sermon series on faith and politics and led an accompanying ten-week class discussion. Research study participants completed a pre-and-post survey to gauge effectiveness.

CHAPTER ONE:

A COMMON PROBLEM

> Cable news is doing a much better job of discipling people than the church is today.
> ― Skye Jethani, *The Holy Post*

My Political Journey

I listened to Rush Limbaugh's conservative radio show growing up. Some of my favorite childhood memories are of our family road trips when we drove across the country, listening to Limbaugh skillfully and winsomely critique the liberal elites for three straight hours. Everything he said made sense to me. Whether he was criticizing big government, unveiling the left's hidden agenda, or rallying his millions of listeners, I wished everyone would listen to him. I was sure if they did, he would convince them, and everyone would vote the right way.

During these formative years, I grew up in a white evangelical Christian home that identified theologically and politically conservative. My parents loved God and taught me the Bible. They taught me not just to go through religious motions but to develop a genuine trust in God through prayer, studying the Bible, and a lifelong commitment to the church. I owe them a deep debt of gratitude for helping me put my faith in Jesus Christ. As I developed my Christian identity, I also developed a conservative identity, the two often intermingling. To be Christian was to be conservative, and to be conservative was to be Christian. One time when a girl from our church came over to our house to play, unprompted, I told her, "Always vote Republican!"

In my teen years, listening to talk radio turned into watching *Fox News* and popular shows like *Hannity and Colmes* and *The O'Reilly Factor*. Their views confirmed my views. The right was right. I did not see how politics were shaping, even hardening, my heart. Over time, a

steady diet of primarily one-sided narratives fostered a posture of self-defensiveness. My politics became a struggle between "us" and "them"—the liberal elites and the common-sense conservatives. Politics became about defending our freedoms and way of life. We had to vote because we had to self-protect. This combative approach grew steadily until college.

During my first semester, one of my activist classmates criticized the war in Iraq, and I swore at her. Another classmate said there was nothing wrong with being gay, and I told her that homosexuality causes AIDS. Over my time in college, I argued for gun rights in speech class and defended more restrictive immigration measures in English class. In history class, I wrote a paper justifying internment camps during WWII for Japanese Americans. In creative writing, I wrote poems about the liberal media and the wickedness of abortion. While I had well-meaning intentions and said many true things, when I engaged in political skirmishes, it often alienated others and hurt me. At the same time, I was growing in my Christian faith. I wanted to know what I believed and why I believed it. I did not anticipate it, but my growing faith in Jesus would soon challenge my political paradigm.

When I took American Government, I asked the professor how I could earn extra credit, and she said I could volunteer on a political campaign. So, over six days, I spent seventeen hours campaigning for Colorado Republican Marilyn Musgrave and her highly contested seat in the House of Representatives. I called party members, walked the precinct, and waved signs at an intersection, trying to motivate like-minded voters. After we lost the election, I told my teacher that sign-waving was "a waste of time." Even as I continued to defend conservative politics, that was slowly how I began to think of politics. Over time I grew to believe that Christians should prioritize more spiritual activities, like evangelism or church ministry. I transitioned from enthusiastic political engagement towards more spiritual pursuits. I also began to see my liberal

classmates more clearly. I ate meals with them, listened to them, and built meaningful relationships with them. I discovered I agreed with some of their perspectives. God used those relationships to slowly open my heart. I regretted the ways I had alienated those around me.

When I graduated from college, I moved to the suburbs of Washington, D.C. I was closer to the "halls of power" than ever before, but they held little draw for me. A year later, the Lord called me north to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) in Massachusetts. Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage in 2004, eleven years before the rest of the country. I had moved from Colorado, a purple swing state, to a solidly blue liberal state. The political culture was vastly different from my previous experience. I began pastoring a moderate to right-leaning church in a majority-left community. I began to wrestle with how to share Christ with a community that often differed from my political background and my congregation.

Nothing caused me to question my Christian allegiance to the Republican party more than the 2016 Presidential election of Donald Trump. His nomination and campaign forced me to think more deeply about my faith and politics. Much like I had started my political journey with talk radio, I began listening to a podcast by Phil Vischer entitled *The Holy Post*.[1] Every week Phil and his co-hosts Skye Jethani and Christian Taylor discussed the news and interviewed Christian authors. While they all understood my conservative Christian background, they showed me discrepancies between my combative approach and Jesus' teachings. As I listened and reflected, I began to learn a new way for Christians to integrate faith and politics. This new paradigm was neither combative nor isolating, but it sought the good of others. It did not require a loss of my Christian convictions. I could obey Jesus but do so with compassion and mercy. The old way often led me to feel suspicious of my political enemies and to fight a culture war. This

1. When I first started listening, *The Holy Post* was entitled *The Phil Vischer Podcast*.

new way reminded me that Jesus was serious when he said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."[2] I was transitioning once again, first from loving politics to thinking they were useless, now to thinking politics could be used for good.

I have now become convinced there is a better way to integrate faith and politics. It is neither Democratic nor Republican, not isolating, alienating, or partisan. This new approach tries to benefit all, regardless of creed, color, or party. It stems from the Bible's understanding of human flourishing and the common good. As I reflect on my political journey, I recognize that many people in my congregation and in other congregations are on a similar path. Like me, believers may struggle with navigating faith and politics, fluctuating between partisanship, isolation, and loss of Christian conviction. They may also want to understand and apply God's word to their contemporary political contexts but might not know how best to do so.

Could the concepts of human flourishing and the common good be a good way to address faith and politics in the church? Should pastors even do political discipleship? Is it possible for pastors and churches to frame politics for their congregations without causing partisan division? For those pastors and churches asking whether it is okay to discuss politics and how best to do so, I hope to offer some helpful reflection.

Three key areas help establish the need for this study: the mission of the church, how politics is a discipleship issue, and the state of evangelical Christianity's public witness. After reviewing these areas, I will present my hypothesis: that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good have given Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and

2. Matthew 5:44b. All scripture references are taken from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

politics. As I reflect on my political journey, I see how much I could have benefited from this kind of integration of my faith and politics. Therefore, I have developed the type of political-theological paradigm that might have helped me, has helped those in my congregation, and may help other churches, ministries, and pastors.

The Mission of the Church

What is the mission of the church? Many pastors believe it is their duty and the church's duty to preach the gospel, teach God's word, and do the work of saving souls, nothing more. While I agree that the church's central mission is to proclaim the gospel, the church needs to proclaim the gospel in all its fullness, in every dimension and direction. Preaching the gospel means faithfully working through salvation and its implications for all of life, including politics.

Understanding the Gospel's Scope

The gospel is God's story of reconciling people to himself.[3] John 3:16, perhaps the most famous evangelical memory verse, reads, "For God so loved the word, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The evangelical emphasis on personal salvation through repentance and faith in Christ is appropriate.[4] However, the gospel extends far beyond individual rescue to God reconciling and restoring all things to himself. The very next verse, John 3:17, reads, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Dr. Russell Moore, author of *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*, writes, "In our attempts to keep the gospel from being too big, we must not end up with a gospel too small to do what Jesus

3. 2 Corinthians 5:17–21.

4. Mark 1:14–15; Luke 24:46–47.

commanded us to do. And that means that often what we address from a gospel framework will be things deemed 'social' or 'political.'"[5]

At the start of his ministry, Jesus likewise defined his gospel mission with social and justice language. In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus opens the great Isaiah scroll and reads:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus preached personal salvation and social transformation for the poor, imprisoned, sick, and oppressed. When he casts out demons and performs miracles later in Luke 4, he identifies these acts as gospel and kingdom ministry.[6] Jesus did not wait till Matthew 28 to define the mission. He expressed it as he preached the gospel, performed miracles, and did acts of justice. Jesus embodied and taught the mission and called his followers to do likewise. There are unique things Jesus did that only he can do, but he did establish a new way of life for his disciples to follow.[7]

The church's understanding of sin influences how it understands its mission. If sin is purely individual, the mission will match that narrow scope. However, if sin is far more complex and pervasive, infecting humankind, creation, and how everyone interacts, including its systems, the mission should reflect this broader scope. Moore explains sin's presence:

> If we are centered on the gospel, then that means that our mission is to expose sin with the light of Christ. Sin is not neatly marked out in silos marked "personal" and "social." The Bible shows us from the beginning that the scope of the curse is holistic in its destruction—personal, cosmic, social, vocational (Gen. 3–11), and the Bible shows us in

5. Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 5, Kindle.

6. Luke 4:43b.

7. Matthew 16:24; John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 22:4. For example, substitutionary atonement is a unique work.

> the end that the gospel is holistic in its restoration—personal, cosmic, social, vocational (Rev. 21–22).[8]

Christ's mercy extends far beyond individual souls to corporate and cosmic restoration. Through Christ Jesus, God reconciles his people to himself and people to creation, including each other. Both the vertical relationship between God and people and horizontal relationships between people and creation matter.[9] The Bible presents a cross-shaped gospel. It is right to prioritize the message of salvation, but salvation that does not fall short of God's cosmic scope. God's mission is to redeem all things, even politics, for the sake of humankind's eternal flourishing.

The Gathered & Scattered Church

The primary way Christ makes the gospel visible in the world is through the ministry of his people, the church. The church trains believers to share gospel words and do gospel deeds then supports them through prayer, accountability, and partnership. Yet even as believers seek the good of the world, they should temper their expectations of what they can accomplish.[10] Genesis 1 calls people to the task of human flourishing, but Genesis 3 recognizes the consequences of the fall and that sin will often thwart this task.

Understanding how to go on mission requires a clear distinction between the institutional church, the formal gathering of believers each Sunday, and the organic church, the scattering of believers into the world throughout the week.[11] Summarizing Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), author and theology professor Dr. Michael Wagenman explains:

> The church is that gathering of Christian believers for worship, preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and corporate discipleship. And the church is also that same body of Christian believers sent out into the whole of the world to bear witness to Christ in every

8. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 5, Kindle. See also Romans 8:20–21.

9. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 5, Kindle.

10. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 228. See Keller's chapter two for a more in-depth analysis of Genesis 1–3.

11. Keller, *Center Church*, 240-241.

> sphere of life. Another way of talking about this is through the rhythms of breathing in and breathing out: the church exists both by "breathing in" (gathered within the church building) and "breathing out" (sent into the world), in a regular weekly rhythm. A living church is gathered and sent, breathing in and out.[12]

The gathered church's job is then to be very intentional and purposeful about its sending of believers. It cannot, for fear of overstepping its bounds, ignore political discipleship, which would leave believers to figure out on their own how to engage with a considerable part of the world. Wagenman continues to explain Kuyper's thoughts and the tensions that arise:

> It is the role of the gathered church to disciple Christian believers to be responsible and engaged citizens. But it is the role of the sent church to debate and endorse specific political platforms and candidates. The gathered church cannot shy away from preaching the comprehensiveness of the gospel, even when it means touching on controversial and debated public issues (otherwise these questions are left in the hands of unformed, undiscipled Christians with little to no Scriptural guidance), and the sent church must embody and unfold the comprehensive application of the gospel in all of life.[13]

Scripture, the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and other pastors can help pastors discern which cultural issues to address and to what extent. Moore and others try to set boundaries where scripture itself sets them. He writes, "On some issues, both of personal morality and of public justice, the church speaks definitively and with clear authority, marking out the boundaries of obedience and disobedience. Other issues we speak in a way that forms consciences in a way of wisdom, but without a clear directive rooted in divine revelation."[14] The Bible itself sets the parameters.

Keller, summarizing Reformed Theologian Dr. Michael Allen, helps define the church's level of engagement. He says, "The church as institution is to stay out of direct political engagement. It holds out the possibility there may be civil issues that 'are extraordinary' – as when a great injustice or wrong is being done about which the Bible speaks directly. But even in

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12. Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), chap. 1, Kindle.

13. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 5, Kindle.

14. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 5, Kindle. I corrected one small typo in this quotation.

extraordinary cases it is still called 'intermeddling.'"[15] Keller, someone who publicly addresses evangelicals and politics, quotes Allen's conclusion. "Pastors and local church leadership would likely speak to societal and political issues only with rarity and great care."[16] While a pastor or church may publicly critique policies, legislation, and politicians' decisions or character, they should not typically offer endorsements. Instead, pastors ought to give their congregations a biblical and theological framework for thinking through political issues so that congregants can arrive at biblically-faithful conclusions.[17] Keller summarizes this balancing act:

> A church that is educating and discipling people to do justice in the public sphere will have to be sensitive to social issues and ills in its teaching and preaching, and yet will not make the fatal mistake of becoming a lobbying group and losing sight of its main mission. . . . faithful churches concerned to maintain the mission of the church as disciple making will disciple people to evangelize – but also to engage culture and do justice.[18]

A church that adopts a parish ministry model, taking care of its members and seeking the flourishing of its local community, will inevitably engage local leaders and policies. If a church is already serving their community's needs, they will naturally work with those addressing the same problems and offer positive contributions.[19]

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15. R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010) 174, quoted in Keller, *Center Church*, 242, 245.

16. Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 174, quoted in Keller, *Center Church*, 242, 245.

17. See Richard J. Mouw, "Carl Henry Was Right," Christianity Today, January 27, 2010, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/january/25.30.html.

18. Keller, *Center Church*, 241.

19. Pastor and author Eugene Cho shares his church's story of working with the homeless in Seattle. "We've sought to convene other local stakeholders, businesses, and churches. We've attended many local community meetings. We've met with the mayor of Seattle along with other officials. We've raised significant resources to assist with the homeless, including funding and volunteering in the building of several 'tiny homes' for women choosing to leave domestic violence or drug addiction." Eugene Cho, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2020), chap. 4, Kindle.

Political Discipleship

Is politics a discipleship issue? Yes. God wants believers to turn every aspect of their life over to him. How believers interact with politics shows what is taking place in their hearts, for better or worse. We will next look at whole-life discipleship, spiritual formation, and how politics shape faith to see why pastors and churches need to do political discipleship.

Whole-Life Discipleship

Pastor and author Neil Hudson defines a disciple, "A disciple is someone learning to live the way of Jesus in their context at this moment."[20] To be a disciple means knowing Jesus, trusting him, and putting his teachings into practice in each person's life and context.[21] The context of American Christianity is becoming increasingly political. Faith and culture professor Dr. Greg Forster writes, "One of the most alarming phenomena in our world is the slow but steady politicization of everything."[22] The family, prayer, education, employment, free speech, caring for the poor, the environment, immigration, and racial justice have all become political. While intimidating, the politicization of everything also provides opportunities for discipleship.

Intrinsic to Hudson's definition of discipleship is not a partial commitment but a whole-life commitment to following Jesus. Jesus himself said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."[23] Discipleship involves being willing to die for Jesus but also actively living for him daily, in every part of life. Paul also calls Christians

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20. Neil Hudson, "The Vision: Whole Life Disciple-making Churches" (Imagine Forum: New England, Vere Institute, October 19, 2019).

21. Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 8:12; 10:27; 1 Peter 2:21.

22. Greg Forster, "To Love the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of To Change the World," in *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "To Love [. . .]," Kindle.

23. Matthew 16:24–26.

to become "a living sacrifice," which means giving everything to God, even civic engagement.[24] Thus, Christians have a new way to interact with the world, a way marked by the sacrifice and the cross. Believers no longer participate to win elections but to know and follow Christ.

Discipleship is not just for the sacred parts of life—worship, church, scripture study, and prayer—but for the ordinary aspects of life, work, family, education, politics, and play. In *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, sociologist Dr. James Davidson Hunter writes, "Formation is about learning to live the alternative reality of the kingdom of God within the present world order faithfully.[25] Jesus is transforming how his followers engage with their culture and contexts. That means Jesus, not any political party, sets the terms for how his followers do politics.

The trouble for pastors and churches is that addressing politics is controversial and potentially divisive. Some contexts prioritize the "separation of church and state" by keeping religion out of politics entirely.[26] In these contexts, congregants want their churches and pastors to "just preach the gospel" or "stick to the Bible." Other contexts welcome the marriage of faith and politics, but in a partisan way, whether it is the mainline church waving their progressive banners or the conservative churches with their anti-abortion lobbying. In 2018, *Christianity Today* analyzed a poll on faith and politics among evangelical Christians. Their analysis revealed that most evangelical Christians do not want their pastors to address politics.

> The data tells us that most American evangelicals are not looking to their pastors for political guidance, and most pastors are not willing to touch the subject lest they get burned. Only 4 in 10 respondents told us they wanted advice from their pastor on political

24. See Romans 12:1 (c.f., 1 Corinthians 10:31)

25. James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 236, Kindle.

26. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 123, Kindle.

> issues. And only 4 in 10 told us their pastor uses Scripture to address political topics at least once a month or more.
>
> Put another way, many evangelicals are likely turning to culture—and often the most outraged voices—rather than the church for political discipleship.[27]

Knowing a congregation is going to resist their teaching on politics would, in many cases, make it more mentally and emotionally challenging for a pastor to do so. While I believe pastors should address politics, knowing how to do so with foresight and care is vital. I want to help pastors do political discipleship by providing a non-partisan yet biblical and theological framework centered on the concepts of human flourishing and the common good.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is a subset of discipleship that primarily deals with what is happening in a person's soul. It helps believers reflect on how outside influences shape them internally. Author Kaitlyn Schiess writes in *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor*, of how the things believers do regularly, their "liturgies," form them spiritually.

> We are spiritually formed (for good or ill) by any number of things, but particularly by those things that are repetitive, embodied, and impart a larger meaning. When we use the phrase "spiritual formation" in the church, we usually mean only the intentional practices we participate in with the expressed purpose of becoming more like Christ. But seeing our unintentional practices, too, as spiritually formative is important. I keep that word, spiritual, because nothing truly formative can impact us in ways that aren't spiritual.[28]

The "liturgies" believers do regularly, like listen to their favorite political pundits or media outlets, are spiritually formative acts. Political commentators become the "Rabbis" under which believers sit. Their goals are often economic, making money, expanding their audience, and gaining influence, not their audience's growth in Christlikeness. Many use disrespectful

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27. Ed Stetzer and Andrew MacDonald, "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump: Debunking the 81%," Christianity Today, October 24, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october/why-evangelicals-trump-vote-81-percent-2016-election.html.

28. Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 15, Kindle.

language and inflammatory dialogue to hold their audience's attention, which becomes a model for how believers engage. Suppose Christians were to track their emotions while reviewing their favorite political media. They might record feelings like hope, happiness, frustration, fear, bitterness, and even rage, all signs of spiritual formation.

Proverbs 4:23 warns, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."[29] Likewise, Jesus says, "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person."[30] All people say, think, and do originates in the heart, the core of who they are. What goes into a person affects what comes out of a person. If people put combative political engagement into their hearts, they should expect to act in politically antagonistic ways. Suppose they consistently open themselves to one-sided political analysis, the vilification of those with different opinions, and amplified fear of what the left or right will do once elected. In that case, they should expect to bear the fruit of worry, anger, and resentment. Instead, believers need to find a way to develop "faith, hope, and love" and "the fruit of the Spirit."[31]

Jesus taught that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love neighbor.[32] Politics has a powerful shaping effect on a person's ability to love their neighbor and who they are even willing to identify as their neighbor. When Jesus taught the Good Samaritan parable, he showed that even the culturally different are still neighbors.[33] Neighbors can include those on the opposite end of the political spectrum. When politics hinders believers from loving their political opposites due to fear, it hinders their ability to love others as Jesus instructed.

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29. (NIV). Tedd Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart* inspired some of my thoughts in this section. Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), chap. 1, Kindle.

30. Matthew 15:18.

31. 1 Corinthians 13:13a; Galatians 5:22a.

32. Matthew 22:37–39.

33. Luke 10:25–37.

Christians need their pastors to guide them down new paths. It can be challenging to overcome the shaping influence of politics on the heart. However, empowered by the Holy Spirit and aided by like-minded ministers, pastors and churches can begin to address politics in a healthy manner.

Politics Shaping Faith

Most probably assume their faith informs their politics. It comforts a devout Christian to believe their actions are biblical, especially their political activity. But what if their politics are forming their faith? I believe politics shapes if and how a person loves God more often than most assume. Dr. Michele F. Margolis, in her book *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity*, says that politics inform and shape peoples' faith at crucial moments in their lives. She writes:

> The pages that follow argue against the widespread assumption that religion, particularly the strength of religious affiliation and involvement in a religious community, is itself impervious to politics. Rather, this book shows that partisan identities can profoundly shape identification with and engagement in the religious sphere. . . .
> . . . partisanship influences religious decision making at a certain life stage, and these partisan-driven religious choices are evident for many years to come.[34]

Margolis shows how young adults generally solidify their partisanship before choosing their religious involvement. An individual's decision to become conservative or liberal influences if they and their family will eventually attend church.

> The timings of the religious and political socialization processes mean that partisan identities form at the very time when religion is a peripheral concern for many people. Then, when individuals must decide if and how to engage in the religious world, their partisan identities—solidified earlier in young adulthood—may exert an important and lasting influence on their religious identifications and practices. . . .
> . . . Republicans' religious identities become stronger while Democrats' religious identities become weaker.[35]

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34. Michele F. Margolis, *From Politics to the Pews (Chicago Studies in American Politics)* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 3, Kindle.

35. Margolis, *Politics to the Pews*, 15.

Margolis shows how if individuals adopt Republican politics, they may become more likely to join a church community.[36] Conversely, if they adopt Democratic politics, they may become less likely to attend church.[37] This pattern creates political "echo chambers" in faith communities, which leads to further alienation of those who differ politically.[38] Margolis writes, "Politically homogeneous social groups and an associated absence of countervailing information not only encourage the creation of durable bonds between religious and partisan identities but may also fuel further political animosity toward the opposing party."[39] Over time, the church, the place God meant to demonstrate counter-cultural love, unity, and diversity, becomes uniform and alienating.[40] No matter their political party, all should feel welcomed in church.

Reviewing her findings, Margolis writes, "It may seem counterintuitive, if not downright implausible, that voting Democrat or Republican could change something as personal as our relationship with God. But over the course of our lives, political choices tend to come first, religious choices second."[41] A believer's faith and understanding of scripture ought to shape their hearts and politics. Instead, their politics often shape their faith and form their souls.

Christian Witness

Pastors and churches should address politics because it is within the church's mission, is a discipleship issue, and Christian engagement affects a watching world. The evangelical church's Christian witness matters individually, corporately, and generationally.

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36. Margolis, Politics to the Pews, 65.

37. Margolis, Politics to the Pews, 102.

38. Margolis, Politics to the Pews, 7.

39. Margolis, Politics to the Pews, 7.

40. John 13:35; Acts 15:1–35; Revelation 7:9–10.

41. Michele Margolis, "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs," *New York Times*, July 11, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html.

Individual Witness

Since the proliferation of social media and the increase of heated volatility in politics, many Christians have struggled to best express themselves online. Instead of trying to model Christ-like behavior, they have gone on the offensive. Baylor University preaching professor Dr. Scott Gibson summarizes the problem:

> Take a look at posts on Twitter or Facebook by people who profess Christ. These posts appear to reflect more commitment to one's political party than to the gospel. The gospel seems to be absent from their posts. Instead, what one finds is meanness, hatefulness, spitefulness, certainly not characteristics of a maturing, growing Christian (e.g., Gal. 5). Page through the New Testament and you'll see that one of the qualities of believers is that they are to have a good reputation among those who aren't believers (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:7). Christians who push their excessive political party priorities in a disparaging manner do damage to their reputation as a believer and to the gospel.[42]

Instead of engaging in civil discourse, letting their "gentleness be evident to all," many believers engage in uncivil combat.[43] This posture mars their witness and the witness of the churches they attend. Christians need to model a more Christlike way, whether two Christians are quarreling online, or a self-identified believer is arguing with their non-believing coworker. Thankfully, many have. However, we should consider another witness—that of evangelicals as a whole.

Evangelical Witness

The corporate Christian community should take into account the perception of the non-Christian culture it inhabits. If, as some say, "perception is reality," how does a watching world perceive evangelical Christianity? The answer should give pastors and churches pause.

When protesters stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021, a watching world saw what they interpreted as Christianity on full display. One man on the Washington mall carried a

42. Scott Gibson, "Preaching to a Politically Divided Congregation," PreachingToday, accessed March 13, 2021, https://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/2021/preaching-to-politically-divided-congregation.html.

43. Philippians 4:5a (NIV). See also 1 Peter 2:12.

large wooden cross and prayed, another a poster with Bible verses and a corresponding list of politicians and causes, and others shouted their love for Jesus and President Trump.[44] One man even carried a Christian flag into the capitol.[45] When the insurrectionists reached the Senate chambers, they shouted Jesus' name, bowed heads, and prayed.[46] One reporter for *The Atlantic* identified the storming of the capitol as a "Christian insurrection" and holds all evangelicals responsible.[47] Reporter Emma Green writes, "White evangelicals, in particular, overwhelmingly supported Trump in 2016 and 2020. Some of these supporters participated in the attack on the Capitol on Wednesday. But many in the country hold all Trump voters responsible— especially those who lent him the moral authority of their faith."[48] While it is tempting for my faith group, evangelicals, to attribute the problem to extremists' actions, our witness was already in question.

NPR Religion and Belief Correspondent Tom Gjelten summarizes the connection I believe many non-Christians are making. On the Sunday following the 2020 election, Gjelten reported, "A notable fact in 2016 was that exit polls showed about 80% of white evangelical Christians supported Trump in spite of his unfamiliarity with the Bible, his divorces, his vulgar rhetoric and his association with porn stars. Trump's reputation in moral terms hasn't changed all that much during his time in office, but there is little evidence of slippage among these faith

44. Emma Green, "A Christian Insurrection: Many of those who mobbed the Capitol on Wednesday claimed to be enacting God's will," *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/.

45. David French, "Only the Church Can Truly Defeat a Christian Insurrection: It's time to combat the right's enabling lies," The Dispatch, January 10, 2021, https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/only-the-church-can-truly-defeat.

46. Michael Luo, "The Wasting of the Evangelical Mind: The peculiarities of how American Christianity took shape help explain believers' vulnerability to conspiratorial thinking and misinformation," The New Yorker, March 4, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-wasting-of-the-evangelical-mind.

47. Emma Green, "A Christian Insurrection," *The Atlantic*.

48. Emma Green, "A Christian Insurrection," *The Atlantic*.

voters."[49] Since the start of his Presidential race, President Trump never shied away from saying things that many found offensive. Some of his comments towards immigrants,[50] a disabled reporter,[51] women,[52] and his general rhetoric led many to wonder how evangelicals could continue to support him. And yet, in 2016, 81% of evangelicals did vote for Trump.

Some think white evangelicals voted for Trump because he was not Hilary Clinton or because he was pro-life and pro-religious liberty. *Christianity Today* analyzed the 81% of evangelicals who voted for him in 2016.[53] They found most were not enthusiastic about him but voted for him because of his positions on the economy, healthcare, national security, and immigration, not for being pro-life or pro-religious liberty.[54] In this same study, *Christianity Today* reported what non-believers thought of evangelicals. "Those concerned about compromising the church's witness by ignoring or justifying immoral behavior for societal gain will be little surprised to learn that when our researchers asked non-evangelicals which characteristics describe evangelical Christians, the most cited (by almost 4 in 10) was hypocritical."[55] The charge of "hypocrite" is painful to hear and deeply concerning. My evangelical community needs to not ignore this charge, but assess whether it has merit.

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49. Tom Gjelten, "2020 Faith Vote Reflects 2016 Patterns," NPR, November 8, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/11/08/932263516/2020-faith-vote-reflects-2016-patterns.

50. Erin Burnett, 2015. "Donald Trump doubles down on calling Mexicans 'rapis…" June 25, 2015. CNN. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jaz1J0s-cL4.

51. John Berman, 2015. "Trump mocks reporter with disability." November 25, 2015. CNN. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX9reO3QnUA.

52. "Trump's uncensored lewd comments about women from 2005," October 7, 2016. CNN. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSC8Q-kR44o.

53. "In the run-up to the 2018 midterm elections, the Billy Graham Center Institute at Wheaton College worked with LifeWay Research to better understand the 81 percent and evangelicals' political engagement. We polled 3,000 Americans in three categories: those who self-identify as evangelicals, those with evangelical beliefs, and those who neither see themselves as evangelicals nor hold certain core evangelical theological views (such as a belief in salvation through Jesus Christ alone)." Stetzer and MacDonald, "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump."

54. Stetzer and MacDonald, "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump."

55. Stetzer and MacDonald, "Why Evangelicals Voted Trump."

During the 2016 Presidential election, a *LifeWay* survey of Protestant pastors found, "27% of pastors say personal character is the most important characteristic of a presidential candidate," which was the most common answer.[56] For some reason, what pastors believed and valued was not received by their congregations. Without pastors and churches doing intentional political discipleship, the church may align with any candidate, no matter their character. They may do so regardless, but at least ministers will have done their part to make disciples first.

Generational Witness

The current partisan patterns are also alienating those in the next generation. Quoting *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, pastor and author Clay Stauffer writes:

> Statistics show that church attendance and religious affiliation among the younger generations (the Millennials) are in sharp decline. There could be many reasons for this, but Putnam and Campbell argue that over-politicization in churches has been a turnoff to the millennial generation. "The politicization of religion has triggered a negative reaction among some, mostly young, Americans. They have pulled away from religion precisely because they perceive it as an extension of partisan politics with which they do not agree. [Millennials] see religion tied up with conservative politics, and their aversion to the latter has led them to reject the former."[57]

Many younger believers desire to love God and neighbor, including immigrants, refugees, and those within the Black community. These positions, however, are not typical Republican causes. Over time, if their Christian communities insist that to be Christian is to be Republican, they may watch as their children walk away from the faith. Churches need a different way of engaging culture for the sake of the next generation of believers.

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56. "Pastor Views on 2016 Presidential Election: Survey of Protestant Pastors," *LifeWay Research*, October 5, 2016, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Sept-2016-Pastor-Views-on-Presidential-Election.pdf.

57. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 428, quoted in Clay Stauffer, *Preaching Politics: Proclaiming Jesus in an Age of Money, Power, and Partisanship* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press. 2016), chap. 1, Kindle.

A Pastoral Opportunity

It is a pastoral issue when a married couple fights over politics, when a church member posts vilifying posts on social media, when there are protests in the local community, when believers fall prey to misinformation, and when an immigrant family is divided.[58] Pastors are uniquely positioned to disciple their congregation's engagement in faith and politics in a Christlike way.[59] When some choose to abdicate political discipleship to those outside of the church, there is a loss of pastoral care. Stauffer, himself a pastor, writes, "In the world of academia, it seems that the more radical or sensational the statement or publication, the better. Preachers, on the other hand, who seek to deal realistically with hot political topics, must do so carefully and responsibly, remembering their pastoral responsibilities."[60] Those outside the church often lack the relational capital and personal insight needed to address the local body's political needs. The goal is not for pastors to convince others of their political positions but to point their congregations to Christ and help them follow him. Political discipleship requires humility, wisdom, and prayerful dependency on the Holy Spirit. I hope this project helps too.

Hypothesis & Definitions

Hypothesis

Political discipleship is necessary because it is within the mission of the church, it is a discipleship issue, and it matters for the church's Christian witness. God has given pastors the unique opportunity to shepherd the politics of their people. Thus, the question is, how might

58. For the last point on immigration, see David M. Bailey and Elena Aronson, "101 Race, Class, & The Kingdom of God: Week 5: The Shalom Continuum | Pt I," Richmond, VA: Arrabon, 2017, video study series, https://arrabon.com/rckg101/101-race-class-kingdom-week-5/.

59. John 8:32.

60. Clay Stauffer, *Preaching Politics*, chap. 5, Kindle. See 1 Peter 5:1–4.

pastors begin to do this? I hypothesized that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good have given Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics.

Human Flourishing

Human flourishing is the biblical concept of "shalom," a rich and dynamic word that conveys peace and wholeness in all of life due to right relationship with God and others. Rachel Anderson, a member of *The Center for Public Justice*, vividly describes flourishing, "In a flourishing community, the image of God is honored in each person, families and other institutions thrive, the vulnerable are protected, the stranger is welcomed, the oppressed are liberated, and everyone enjoys peace and security."[61] While I talk about the flourishing of a community, full human flourishing as God intends is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Common Good

The common good is beneficial for the whole community, not just a particular group of people. 1 Corinthians 10:24 says, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." The Bible's conception of the common good is rooted in loving God, neighbors, and even enemies, which believers and churches work out in their local contexts.

Engaging Civilly

Civil engagement does not mean uniformity of belief but rather a general sense of unity, respect, and even love for one another as believers discuss complex issues. The former President of Fuller Seminary, Dr. Richard Mouw, explains civility:

> Civility is public politeness. It means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners toward people who are different from us. . . .

61. Rachel Anderson, *Political Discipleship: A Group Study for Christian Citizenship - Participant Guide* (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, PDF), 6.

> . . . In the past civility was understood in much richer terms. It was a willingness to promote the well-being of people who were very different, including people who seriously disagreed with you on important matters. Civility wasn't merely an external show of politeness. It included an inner politeness as well.[62]

Civility does not guarantee that no one will be offended or leave the church. Instead, civility is a manner of doing things that is intended to help foster discussion, learning, and harmony.

Ministry Setting

I tested my hypothesis at the congregation I serve as pastor, Cornerstone Congregational Church. Cornerstone is a majority white-evangelical church residing in the New England town of Westford, Massachusetts, an hour north-west of Boston in Middlesex County. In Middlesex County, 2.7% of residents identify as Evangelical Protestants,[63] which seems to be true of Westford. Historically, residents have valued religion, education, and civic engagement.[64] Many community members are politically engaged in both national and local concerns. Massachusetts consistently votes Democratic in Presidential and Congressional elections while electing Republicans to the Governor's office. Westford follows the same pattern. In the 2016 Presidential election, Hilary Clinton received 7,760 votes, 56% of votes. Donald Trump received

62. Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 14, Kindle.

63. "2010 data were collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and include statistics for 236 religious groups, providing information on the number of their congregations and adherents within each state and county in the United States. Clifford Grammich, Kirk Hadaway, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley and Richard H. Taylor supervised the collection." "County Membership Report: Middlesex County (Massachusetts)," ARDA: Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed December 7, 2020, https://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/rcms2010A.asp?U=25017&T=county&Y=2010&S=tradition.

64. Edwin R. Hodgman, *History of the Town of Westford, in the County of Middlesex, Massachusetts, 1659-1883* (Lowell, MA: The Westford Town History Association, 1883), 314-315, Google Books.

4,657 votes, 33% of votes.[65] In the 2020 Presidential election, Joe Biden received 10,078 votes, 66% of the vote, while Donald Trump received 4,618 votes, 30% of the vote.[66]

While it seems a minority of Cornerstone is politically liberal, most are politically moderate or conservative. While often fluctuating, Cornerstone tends to consist of a majority of white evangelical Christians. In general, this demographic is susceptible to partisan politics. Reviewing a 2018 survey, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Dr. Ryan Burge summarizes:

> Looked at broadly, we see from this data there is essentially no difference between a Republican who is white and born-again and a Republican in general. There are some issues where there is a slight difference: namely marijuana legalization and some racial issues, but by and large white evangelical Republicans look like the average Republican.[67]

Burge believes white evangelicals' theology makes no difference to their politics and is so "intertwined with Republican politics that the two reinforce each other."[68] He argues that the typical white evangelical votes Republican because partisan authorities say to do so.[69] While I cannot say if this is true of Cornerstone, I wanted to help my church take a different path.

As the pastor of a conservative-leaning church in a majority liberal context, I also wanted to give my congregation a new vision for engaging in politics. I did not want to alienate our liberal neighbors or our conservative congregation. Pastors may offer their congregations a non-partisan theological framework to help them navigate their politics. Being non-partisan does not

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65. Alexander Silva, "Westford's 2016 election results are in," Wicked Local: Westford, last updated November 9, 2016, https://westford.wickedlocal.com/news/20161108/westford-2016-election-recap.

66. Town of Westford, "Presidential Election: November 3, 2020: Unofficial Results," accessed December 7, 2020, https://www.westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9565/November-3-2020-Presidential-Election-UNOFFICIAL-RESULTS.

67. Ryan P. Burge, "Is 'White Born-Again Christian' Just a Synonym for 'Republican'?" *Religion in Public* (blog), February 5, 2019, https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/02/05/is-white-born-again-christian-just-a-synonym-for-republican/. Margolis's findings in *Politics to the Pews* seem to generally match (p. 23).

68. Ryan P. Burge, 'White Born-Again Christian.'

69. Ryan P. Burge, 'White Born-Again Christian.'

mean refusing to address political issues. Instead, being non-partisan means addressing political issues with a high level of commitment to all of what the Bible teaches, no matter how unfavorably one party or both might receive it. I hoped to help my church members navigate national political concerns and think about engaging at a local level for the sake of the common good of Westford and surrounding communities. While this project is limited to one particular church body, I hope to benefit other pastors and churches too.

Testing the Hypothesis

Direct teaching took place in the form of a ten-week sermon series entitled *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* that used each letter of the word "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." to communicate a key concept or command for human flourishing and the common good. Concepts are biblical ideas, theological truths, and or principles. Commands are things the Bible teaches Christians to do. Together, these concepts and commands create a theological framework for making political decisions. By remembering "flourish," I hoped my congregation would be able to recall at least 2-3 ways to engage in politics biblically. I also led a discussion of each week's topic during the following week's Christian education hour. This format allowed the congregation to "push back" and "wrestle with" the content through further teaching and conversation.

Faith & Flourishing in Politics Teaching Series

1. Vision of Flourishing (Genesis 1–3; Creation)

In the first sermon, I introduced the biblical concept of human flourishing and the image of God. I highlighted the tension between how God intended all creation for good, including the government, but how the fall marred humanity's rule. Despite peoples' best intentions and the possibility for flourishing, politics often fall short. However, God promises to redeem all things, even politics, for good, and so Christians can engage with hope and expectation.

2. F - Faith, Not Fear (Matthew 5–7; Sermon on the Mount)

Politicians often use fear to motivate engagement, but Jesus taught his disciples to do nothing out of fear but to walk by faith. Fear causes modern-day disciples to fight against culture, take flight from culture, or fuse with culture. Faith helps believers practice "faithful presence."[70] Faithful presence leads to human flourishing and the common good.

3. L - Love God & Neighbor (Matthew 22:35–40; Law)

The Great Commandment is to love God and the second is to love our neighbor. Politics affects believers' ability to love God and neighbor. The Good Samaritan story in Luke 10:30–37 teaches that our neighbor is often those we do not like, even our political polar opposite. Loving our neighbors also includes loving our enemy and praying for them. No matter what the political pundits say, a believer's actual battle is not against "flesh and flood."[71] We love God and neighbor, even enemies, because Jesus first loved us.

4. O - Other people's good (Jeremiah 29:4–7; Exile)

In this sermon, I introduced the biblical concept of shalom, seeking the welfare of the city. Believers identify themselves primarily as citizens of heaven called to live as exiles in a foreign land where they seek community welfare and the common good. Part of this mandate is to pray for the city, but not to misapply 2 Chronicles 7:14 to any nation today. Rather, scripture gives us a clear way to pray for rulers in 1 Timothy 2:1–4.

5. U - Understanding and wisdom (Proverbs 8:15–17; James 3:13–18; Wisdom)

There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies and politicians. The Bible is not a public policy manual. The Bible endorses humility and wisdom, not politicians or policies.

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70. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 237.

71. Ephesians 6:12b.

Wisdom helps bridge the gap between flourishing and public policy. Wisdom requires listening and learning, and then action. Wise leadership helps a nation flourish. Jesus embodies wisdom and grants it to those who seek him.

6. R - Reign of Christ (Romans 13:1–7; Philippians 3:20–21; Kingdom of God)

Should Christians say the pledge of allegiance to America or any country? God calls believers to submit to the government, which often means obedience, but sometimes means disobedience if the government is disobeying God's word. The government derives its authority from God. Thus, our total allegiance must belong to God and his kingdom, as made manifest in the declaration, "Jesus is Lord." While patriotism, defined well, can be good, Christian nationalism is idolatrous. Our heavenly citizenship helps us become better earthly citizens.

7. I – Image of God (Mark 12:13–17; Imago Dei)

Jesus calls upon the doctrine of the image of God to navigate a partisan question about taxes. By doing so Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry. He both affirms human authority, yet right-sizes it. The image of God grants each person immense value and worth. Humankind's inherent value challenges how we treat both the wealthy and the marginalized, those we agree with politically, and those with whom we disagree. The image of God gives each person a baseline dignity that supersedes all other human laws.

8. S - Speak prophetically (Amos 5:21–24; Prophets)

The Bible calls believers not just to faithful presence but to "faithful prophetic presence."[72] Like the prophets of old, God calls the church and believers to speak truth to power. We do so empowered by the Holy Spirit, not in anger, but with self-sacrificial love like Christ.

72. Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," in *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Faithful Presence Needs [. . .]," Kindle.

9. H - Help the needy (Zechariah 7:8–12; Matthew 25:31–46; Judgment)

Jesus' strict words about caring for the poor is a continuation of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy, including basic needs. Jesus himself, identified with the poor and needy, but his grace moves us to help. We should become Matthew 25 Christians who help the needy.

10. Eternal Flourishing. (Revelation 21–22; Eternity)

I concluded by describing the flourishing future God has promised those who love him. As believers, when we keep that flourishing future in mind, it should change how we live and operate in today's world, not with a "scarcity mindset" or having to win at cost to others, but able to truly seek the best for our neighbor. If we remember the "already but not yet," we know we will not achieve eternity through our own effort. And yet the work of flourishing has eternal significance. Together, believers look forward to Christ's final restoration with the new heavens and new earth, at which time he will fulfill humanity's hope for complete and eternal flourishing.

I defined success with several key factors, including the congregation's ability to incorporate the theology from my series into a framework, their continued congregational harmony as we addressed a divisive topic, and the overall development of their thinking on the integration of faith and politics. I measured my effectiveness by performing an all-church pre-sermon-series survey and an all-church post-sermon-series survey. In the post-survey, I asked questions to determine if an individual participated in the discussions and how it affected their experience. I contrasted those who attended the class with those who only listened to sermons.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2: Biblical & Theological Foundations

I review the themes and topics in scripture that I taught in my sermon series, including creation, the Sermon on the Mount, the law, exile, wisdom, kingdom of God, image of God, the prophets, judgment, and eternity, along with other related themes. I connect all these themes back to human flourishing and the common good. These chapters proved foundational for the sermon series and Christian Education hour discussion.

Creation & The Fall: When God made humankind in his image and called them to "be fruitful and multiply," he called people to the task of human flourishing.[73] God intended humanity to rule over creation for the good of people. Genesis 1 contains a pre-fall mandate for government and politics. However, while politics are inherently God-given and intended for good,[74] they are also limited in producing good due to the fall.[75] Therefore, believers are hopeful for politics yet aware of their limitations. In Genesis 1, the image of God grants value and significance to every person, no matter their station or country of origin. This doctrine helps restore dignity to a political process that often lacks it.

Exile & Shalom: God sent Israel into exile because they rejected his covenant by not seeking the common good of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.[76] Once in exile, God called them to "seek the welfare of the city," where he sent them into exile.[77] "Welfare" is the

73. Genesis 1:26–27.

74. Genesis 1–2.

75. Genesis 3.

76. Isaiah 58; Amos 4–5.

77 Jeremiah 29:4–7.

word "shalom," which means not only "absence of conflict" but "the presence of wholeness."[78] The concept of shalom helps define human flourishing and the common good. The church is also in exile as citizens of heaven.[79] Shalom is different from Pax-Romana.

The Law: Jesus commands his disciples to love God and neighbors. Believers obey him by seeking the good of their community. Politics has a significant effect on how believers love their neighbors. Jesus taught the Good Samaritan parable in Luke 10 to stretch his disciples' conception of their neighbors. They can be very culturally different and still neighbors. When believers love God, others, and enemies, they model a new kind of community for the world.

Speaking Prophetically: The prophets spoke truth to power. God calls pastors, churches, and believers to speak truth winsomely and faithfully but not giving into partisan temptations.

Wisdom: Much of politics is a matter of wisdom. While believers know what is just, they may not know how to achieve it, which is why Christians need wisdom and understanding. Biblical wisdom can help create just policies.

The Kingdom of God: Christ's kingdom is different from the world's kingdoms. Citizenship in the Kingdom of God should transform a believer's understanding of patriotism and national loyalty. The church is a "distinct political community."[80]

The Great Commission: In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says to "make disciples of all nations." This commission is not merely geographic but social.[81] Jesus calls his followers to make disciples in every level of society and culture. Disciples love Jesus and obey his commands.

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78. Stephen Um, *Gospel Shaped Mercy Leader's Guide: The Gospel Coalition Curriculum* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2017), 35.

79. Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 1:1.

80. Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2012), 22, Kindle.

81. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 256.

Church Community: The early church seeks the common good above their own needs.

Faith, Not Fear: Many partisans use fear of the unknown and worry to enflame their political base. Many Christians have succumbed to this form of manipulation. God is clear that his followers are not to give in to fear but to have faith in him and his plans.

Revelation: How believers understand the end matters for how they live in the present. When Christ returns, he will value every act of service done unto him and for the good of others. True and forever human flourishing will be fulfilled at that time.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

I use James Davidson Hunter's fourfold paradigm from *To Change the World* as an outline for analyzing various authors and their paradigms.[82] This framework allows me to contrast Hunter with each one and review how these authors engage in faith and politics and pursue human flourishing and the common good. Along with Hunter, I typically include Gregory Thompson and Timothy Keller's paradigms as they build upon Hunter's construct.

In Hunter's first paradigm, "Defensive Against," I contrast him with Wayne Grudem and Abraham Kuyper. I propose that Grudem's position is primarily partisan, and Kuyper's position, while better, lacked civility. I contrast Grudem's party-line policies with the wisdom-based principles of Robert Benne and Jonathan Leeman.

In Hunter's second paradigm, "Purity From," I show how Gregory Boyd and John Howard Yoder both fit into this category. While both add meaningfully to the discussion on how to engage in culture, they both share separatist theology and posturing.[83]

82. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 214, 218, 215, 272.

83. I make note of John Howard Yoder's sexual misconduct in chapter three.

In Hunter's third paradigm, "Relevance To," I review the most influential evangelical liberal voice in recent history, Jim Wallis. While there is much I admire about his position, I show how his incomplete presentation of God's holiness weakens his call for biblical justice.

Finally, in Hunter's fourth paradigm, "Faithful Presence," I critique what his position lacks, a clear prophetic voice. Using authors Vermon Pierre, Miroslav Volf, and again, Timothy Keller, I expand Hunter's approach to better cultivate human flourishing and the common good.

Chapter 4: The Project

I proceeded with the thesis-project as previously outlined in "Testing the Hypothesis." I explain why this project is a good approach for testing my hypothesis, how I implemented the project, the design and utilization of the surveys, errors in methodology, and a review and analysis of the data.

Chapter 5: Outcomes

In the final chapter, I make further conclusions about the data and reflect on project outcomes. I evaluate the hypothesis, review participant critiques, and recommend changes to the teaching series. I reflect on how it impacted my ministry, how it might affect similar ministries, and how it could help less similar ministries. I include potential next steps, including publishing a book and my idea to create a non-profit to help pastors and churches make gospel-centered disciples in faith and politics, *The Center for Political Discipleship*. I include a list of recommended resources for other pastors and churches who may want to address this topic. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on my continued political journey, including my Doctorate of Ministry thesis-project and how it helped me grow as a pastor, citizen, and follower of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO:

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

> The two most potent images of human flourishing in the Western cultural traditions come from the Bible, from the opening chapters of its first book and from the final chapters of its last. . . . The promise of these visions of flourishing is a prize jewel in the treasury of the Christian faith, one of its best gifts to the world.
>
> ― Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing*

Introduction

In chapter one, I asked how pastors and churches should disciple their congregations in their political engagement. I hypothesized that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts of human flourishing and the common good, along with corresponding commands, gave my congregation a theological framework for engaging in faith and politics. In chapter two, I examine human flourishing and the common good from Genesis to Revelation, focusing on the creation, fall, exile, shalom, law, prophets, wisdom, kingdom of God, great commission, church, faith, and new heavens and earth.

From this chapter, I create my biblical-theological framework for engaging in faith and politics. Jake Meador, the author of *In Search of the Common Good*, explains why this matters, "The reason much recent Christian political activism in the United States has offered such disappointing returns is that, for the past thirty years (at least), American Christians have obsessed over policy, mostly passed over doctrine with a shrug, and pursued the civil formation of Christian citizens only in a stop-start, halting manner."[1] Evangelical Christianity has spent a

1. Jake Meador, *In Search of the Common Good: Christian Fidelity in a Fractured World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 159, Kindle.

lot of time lobbying for particular policy positions. However, evangelicals could have better spent that time forming people to represent Christ well in the public square. Meador adds, "It is possible for two people to agree on doctrine and disagree on a particular policy as it relates to that doctrine. Valuing life is doctrine. A nationwide ban on abortion is policy."[2] A framework focuses more on doctrine and civil formation than particular policy decisions.

The Genesis of Flourishing

By examining creation, the image of God, dominion, and the fall in Genesis, we find what God originally intended and still intends for humankind and our mutual flourishing.

Creation

In the dark and formless void, God takes chaos and nothingness and transforms it into a garden where humankind can flourish and grow.[3] Whether or not people believe in him, God makes creation and flourishing a reality. While people can experience elements of flourishing—love, happiness, family, work, success, meaning—they cannot experience complete flourishing apart from a relationship with God. Dr. Miroslav Volf, director of the *Yale Center for Faith and Culture*, writes, ". . . [T]o be free, full, and flourishing, life must be lived in relationship to the divine."[4] Thus, while I use the term "flourishing" to mean seeking a community's peace and wholeness, full flourishing is only possible through a relationship with God. John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except

2. Meador, *In Search of the Common Good*, 158, Kindle.

3. Genesis 1.

4. Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 81, Kindle.

through me." Jesus makes a relationship with God possible.[5] Thus, along with caring for their communities, believers should seek their ultimate flourishing by sharing Jesus.

Image of God

In Genesis 1:26a, God made people in his image, the Imago Dei, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Humans are not the same as the lesser orders, plants or animals. People are a member of creation, yet the very best of creation, its "crown jewel."[6] Being made in God's image grants every human inherent dignity and worth. Before aborting the preborn or locking immigrants away in cages, believers should ask whether these actions honor God's image or dehumanize people to the status of plant or animal. When people value God's image in each other, they not only honor God but cultivate human flourishing and the common good.

The Hebrew word for "image" can elsewhere mean idol.[7] Idol worship inhibits a flourishing relationship with God. Ironically, when people make idols, they dishonor the idols God has already made, people, God's only authorized idols.[8] To make something less than a living-breathing idol of the living God mischaracterizes God and distorts creation. Much of political folly stems from idolatry. It is idolatry when one group of people treats those like them as more valuable than others. Partisan politics leverage affinity groups against each other through "us" vs. "them" rhetoric. Whenever a general sense of civic pride turns into a complete commitment to a candidate, party, or nation, at the cost of human dignity or the welfare of others, it is idolatry and mars God's image.

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5. Romans 3:23; 6:23.

6. Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018), chap. 2, Kindle.

7. Numbers 33:52; 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chronicles 23:17; Amos 5:26.

8. See Tremper Longman III, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 54, Kindle.

Jesus used the doctrine of the image of God to navigate politics.[9] When the Pharisees tried to entrap him into endorsing Caesar's taxes, he requested a Roman coin. He asked, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"[10] The Greek word for likeness is "eikon" and means "a material image, likeness, effigy."[11] Jesus' question, then, is, "Whose idol is on this coin?" When they identify the image as Caesar's, Jesus says, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."[12] While Caesar's coins belong to him, God made all people in his image, and so all belong to God. Dr. James Skillen, founding director of *The Center for Public Justice*, explains how Jesus subordinates Caesar.

> When Jesus explained that the coin could serve its legitimate purpose in making a tax payment, he was subtly demoting Caesar from his position of pretended divinity to the position of a mere servant, one who has authority to claim a tax payment but not to demand everything from the people. Only God may lay claim to human beings in their entirety. Caesar may legitimately collect taxes in order to exercise his responsibilities as a public servant under God, but he, too, owes everything, including his governing responsibility, to God.[13]

While Jesus has granted Caesar limited authority, he has affirmed God's greater lordship over all things. The doctrine of the image of God supersedes all earthly laws and leaders, and as Jesus models, ought to be a foundation for Christian political engagement.

Before supporting a party or candidate, believers need to ask, "How does this candidate and their positions personally and systemically treat people?" If a candidate honors the dignity of one group while attacking another, they do not value God's image and are idolatrous. It is a

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9. Matthew 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:19–26.

10. Matthew 22:20b.

11. *Mounce's Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. William D. Mounce and Rick D. Bennett, Jr., Accordance Bible Software, MGD, s.v. "εἰκών," paragraph 4533. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#4533. "Eikon" sounds like our English word, "icon."

12. Matthew 22:21.

13. James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction* (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 26, Kindle.

Christian's duty to treat all people with dignity and respect, no matter their party, nationality, legal status, age, gender, sexual orientation, or other differentiating factors. When believers encounter politicians or laws that distort the image of God, even among those they voted for, they should critique their actions and reorient them to treating God's image with respect.

Dominion

In Genesis 1:28b, God says, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." The Hebrew word for "fruitful" also means "flourish."[14] God entrusted humankind with authority over creation, "dominion," to make it flourish. While dominion can mean abusive domination,[15] it is also used for how the Messiah will rule.[16] Catholic Bishop Dr. Robert Barron says "dominion" does not mean "exploitative lordship" but "stewardship."[17] God intends humankind to use their rule, which is an extension of his authority, for the common good of all creation.[18] Genesis 1:28 is a common-good mandate, which is inherently social-political. When God made people in his image, he appointed them to a position of governance, from which he expected them to shape the earth and its commodities for creation's good.[19] Being made in God's image grants all people, rich or poor, male or female, the

14. *Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger III and William D. Mounce, Accordance Bible Software, s.v. "פ," paragraph 14541, https://accordance.bible/link/read/KM_Hebrew_Dictionary#14541.

15. Leviticus 26:17; Nehemiah 9:28; Isaiah 14:2; Lamentations 1:13.

16. Numbers 24:19; Psalm 49:14; 72:8.

17. Robert Barron, *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 197. Kindle.

18. Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot*, 55, Kindle.

19. Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 63-64, Kindle. See also "Lecture on the Early Church & Politics: Tim Mackie (The Bible Project)" Aug 14, 2017, Tim Mackie Archives, https://youtu.be/wXcSJVW8rg4.

authority to rule and cultivate the world, whether they do so poorly or as stewards. Politics is part of humankind's God-given task of stewardship.

The Fall

While many consider politics and politicians to be inherently evil, God invented politics before the fall. Thus, it is good. But due to the fall, sin has corrupted politics and what it can accomplish. Dr. Bruce Fields of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School writes, "Thus, after the fall, the political realm became distorted like many other good elements of creation. But government itself is a good element of creation."[20] When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he cursed them with consequences that are, in part, political. When God cursed Eve in Genesis 3:16, he gave her husband "rule" over her. The fall distorts social relationships. The Hebrew word for "rule" can mean a rule that is either political or non-political.[21] Likewise, God curses the ground so that Adam's work will often be painful, fruitless, and end in death.[22] All work, politics too, is marred.

The doctrine of the fall teaches two truths. First, Christians can approach politics with faith, hope, and even optimism that God can use them for good. Politics have a God-given potential to benefit society. It can be good to vote, run for office, work in public service, and engage in government. However, second, like the rest of creation, politics have become corrupt. Politics will never be as good as it could be due to sin's personal and systemic nature. Sin has incredible power to shape the human heart and influence government towards selfish goals that

20. Bruce Fields, "The Black Church (Prophetic) View," in *Five Views on The Church and Politics*, ed. Amy E. Black (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 112, 232, Kindle.

21. TLOT lists the following uses fpr "masal" as non-political: Genesis 3:16; 37:8; Exodus 21:8; Deuteronomy 15:6; Joel 2:17; Habakkuk 1:14; etc., and the following as political: Genesis 45:8, 26; Joshua 12:2, 5; Judges 8:22–23; 9:2; 14:4; 15:11; 2 Samuel 23:3; 1 Kings 5:1. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Accordance Bible Software, s.v. "2:689," משל. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Jenni-Westermann#7634.

22. Genesis 3:17–19.

hinder the common good. Politics live in the tension between what could be and what is. Believers may strive for justice and change, only to experience setbacks. Until Christ's final redemption, Christians can participate in politics neither crippled by fear or overly expectant of what they can accomplish but hopeful and confident that God can and will work through them.

Exile & Shalom

The themes of exile and shalom in the Old Testament and New help believers today seek their communities' flourishing. We will also contrast shalom with Pax Romana.

Exile

As a consequence of their sin, God casts humanity out of his presence in the garden, the first of many exiles.[23] God introduces himself to Abram, whom he would soon rename Abraham, and calls him away from his home.[24] He leads Abram through a time of exile in Egypt, foreshadowing his descendants' exile there.[25] But even when Abraham does make it to the Promised Land, he is still in exile. Hebrews 11:10 says, "For [Abraham] was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God." Abraham's biological descendants, the Israelites, and spiritual descendants, the church, continue to live in exile.[26]

Israel is enslaved and afflicted in Egypt for four hundred years.[27] Through Moses, God transforms their exile into exodus and brings them to the Promised Land. Due to the people and

23. Genesis 3:23–24.

24. Genesis 12:1. For name change see Genesis 17:5.

25. Genesis 12:10.

26. Leviticus 25:23; Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:7.

27. Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40–41; Acts 7:6; Galatians 3:16–17. The Israelites live there between 400 to 430 years.

their kings doing evil in the Lord's sight, the Israelites struggle to stay in Canaan.[28] Their presence in the Promised Land is dependent on their obedience to the Sinai covenant, which they continually disobey.[29] They reject God's law by not seeking the common good of the poor and oppressed.[30] Israel's idolatry and social sins lead to their Babylonian captivity.[31] Yet when God sends the Israelites into exile, he calls them to benefit their captors and seek their flourishing.

Shalom

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the Israelite exiles in Babylon God's words for how he wanted them to treat their non-Israelite neighbors while in captivity. Jeremiah writes:

> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.[32]

The Hebrew word for "welfare" is "shalom." Theologian Dr. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. defines shalom. He writes, "In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight — a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."[33] In exile, the Israelites are to go beyond basic peace-keeping to seek the good of their world, to be

28. Judges 2:11–15; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; 1 Kings 11:6; 14:22; 15:26, 34; 16:25; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:2; 8:18, 27; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:2; 21:2, 16, 20; 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19; Isaiah 39:5–8.

29. Leviticus 18:28; Deuteronomy 28:36.

30. Isaiah 58; Amos 4–5; Micah 6:6–8.

31. 2 Kings 24:13–16; 2 Chronicles 36:20–21. See 2 Kings 17:5–7 for northern Israel's exile.

32. Jeremiah 29:5–7.

33. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 10.

fruitful and multiply as God wanted in Genesis 1.[34] They seek shalom not just for self-preservation but for their neighbors' good. Hunter explains this is no easy calling:

> Clearly it would have been justifiable for the Jews to be hostile to their captors. It also would have been natural enough for them to withdraw from engaging the world around them. By the same token, it would have been easy for them to simply assimilate with the culture that surrounded them. Any of these three options made sense in human terms. But God was calling them to something different—not to be defensive against, isolated from, or absorbed into the dominant culture, but to be faithfully present within it.[35]

This is the temptation of all God's people, no matter their time and context. Will they oppose the culture, flee the culture, become no different than the culture, or remain within the culture yet faithful to God's will? Hunter unpacks what "faithful presence," shalom, meant for Israel:

> On the face of it, this was not a posture of radical and prophetic challenge to the powers that be, but neither was it a passive acceptance of the established order. The people of Israel were being called to enter the culture in which they were placed as God's people—reflecting in their daily practices their distinct identity as those chosen by God. He was calling them to maintain their distinctiveness as a community but in ways that served the common good.[36]

Only through keeping covenant with God while intentionally blessing their neighbors could the Israelites fulfill their calling. This is also true for the church today, a people still in exile.

The Church in Exile

Whether a believer is living in Palestine in the first century, or in Westford, Massachusetts, in the twenty-first century, they are in exile. Paul identifies believers as foreigners, "But our citizenship is in heaven," and Peter calls believers "sojourners and exiles."[37] Moore writes, "Our call is to an engaged alienation, a Christianity that preserves the distinctiveness of our gospel while not retreating from our callings as neighbors, and friends, and

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34. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 176, Kindle. See also Exodus 1:7.

35. James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 277, Kindle.

36. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 276, 277-278, Kindle.

37. Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11. See also 1 Peter 1:1, 17.

citizens."[38] Although God took Abraham out of Chaldea, the land of Babylon, to redeem him, God sends Abraham's spiritual descendants, the church, back to Babylon to redeem it.[39] Today, believers live in Babylon's spiritual successors and seek their welfare through serving them and sharing Christ. Cultivating shalom in exile is the responsibility not just of the individual believer but of the church community. God calls the local church to serve their neighbors and care for the poor.[40]

Shalom vs. Pax Romana

The kind of peace, shalom, God calls his people to seek is fundamentally different from what the world offers. Jesus established Christianity in a time of unparalleled peace called the Pax Romana, the "Roman peace."[41] While the Pax Romana may have assisted the spread of Christianity, it was not shalom. Shalom is not merely peace, the "absence of conflict," but "the presence of wholeness."[42] Rome created Pax Romana through violence, war, and nationalism.[43] Scholar and popular author Dr. Preston Sprinkle writes, "Rome embedded in the hearts of its citizens a thick narrative of power, pride, and unparalleled military might. True pax comes through the military of Romana—the hope of the world. Don't you forget it!"[44] Likewise,

38. Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), chap. "Introduction," Kindle.

39. Genesis 11:31; Romans 4:11–17; Galatians 3:16, 29.

40. Matthew 5:14–16; 25:31–46; Luke 10:25–37; Galatians 6:10.

41. See Nathan P. Feldmeth, *Pocket Dictionary of Church History: Over 300 Terms Clearly and Concisely Defined*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 120.

42. Stephen Um, *Gospel Shaped Mercy Leader's Guide: The Gospel Coalition Curriculum* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2017), 35.

43. See David E. Garland, *Luke: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Luke 2:1–21 ("Theology in Application"), Kindle.

44. Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 124, Kindle.

believers in America, the nation with a history of bloodshed and violence, should not trust or praise its "Roman peace." Peace won by violence is different from what Christ offers, shalom.

The Law

When Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, God declared, "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'"[45] When the gentile nations encountered Israel, God intended for them to hear of him and join his covenant community.[46] God created the law to distinguish his people and set them apart as holy.[47] The law would guard Israel against pagan religious practices, protect the weak and vulnerable, and provide checks and balances for a flourishing society.[48] Much of the law could be summed up in Leviticus 19:18b, ". . . but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." God gave the law to the Israelites for their good and the common good of their neighbors, even foreigners.[49] It both distinguished Israel and allowed for a healthy relationship with others, giving Israel a sense of "faithful presence" in the world. Next, we examine several law themes: love God, neighbor, and enemy, and a city on a hill people.

Love God

The Shema, a text the Israelites prayed twice daily, summarizes much of the law. The Shema says, "'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."[50] God called his people to love and worship him alone among a multitude of foreign idols. Self-described "Bible nerd,"

45. Exodus 19:6a.

46. Exodus 9:14, 16; 12:38; 15:14. See also Genesis 12:1–3.

47. Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8; 1 Peter 1:15–16.

48. Paganism: Leviticus 18; 19:19, 26–31. Poverty: Leviticus 19:9–18, 32. Balance: Leviticus 19:15, 35–36; Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

49. Leviticus 19:33–34.

50. Deuteronomy 6:4–5.

Dr. Tim Mackie and co-founder of the *BibleProject*, says the Shema "functioned both as the Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise."[51] In the New Testament, when the Pharisees ask Jesus which commandment is greatest, he answers with the Shema.[52] But where Israel falls short of fulfilling the law, Jesus obeys it perfectly. Now, through faith in Christ, Christians can love God as God intended in fulfillment of the law, even the Shema.[53] True flourishing is dependent on knowing God, which is possible through knowing and loving Christ Jesus.

In Revelation, Mackie explains how the author John contrasts God's name written on his people's foreheads, which follows the Shema, with the beast's mark on all others' foreheads.[54] He writes, "You either give your allegiance to Jesus and allow it [to] influence how you see and act, or your allegiance will belong to destructive powers that will also govern how you see and what you do in life. One path leads to life, the other to death."[55] To put anyone or anything above Jesus, whether a nation or political party, leads to destruction. Israel's law, therefore, has enormous social and political implications. Believers today face the same temptations the Israelites faced. Will believers love God first or worship nations, political figures, or the economic security they offer? To do so is idolatry. Schiess explains:

> While our relationships to chocolate chip cookies and football teams can certainly dishonor God, perhaps we've watered down the language of idolatry to the point where we miss the real idols. Political participation has a unique ability to inspire idolatry in people precisely because it so often involves promises of protection and provision, requires sacrifices, legitimizes authority, and inspires submission and worship.[56]

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51. Tim Mackie, "What is the Shema?" BibleProject, accessed January 18, 2021, https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema/. The page says it was published "4 years ago."

52. Matthew 22:36–38.

53. Matthew 5:17–18; John 3:16; 14:21; 1 John 4:19. Mackie references John in his article above.

54. Deuteronomy 6:8; Revelation 14:16–17; 22:4. Mackie, "What is the Shema?" BibleProject.

55. Tim Mackie, "What is the Shema?" BibleProject.

56. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 35, Kindle.

Joshua warns Israel when they entered the Promised Land that they will perish if they partner with foreign nations and marry pagans.[57] The prophets also warned of Israel's alliances with other countries.[58] Today, when the church binds itself to political parties and powers, it commits idolatry. The church must love God more than anything else, including political power.

Love Neighbor

Jesus affirmed that the greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love one's neighbor.[59] God desires believers' love for him to extend outward to those around them. Jesus further defines the neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan.[60] When a Jewish man is attacked by robbers and left for dead, both a priest and Levite, the religious elite, walk by on the far side of the road. They are public servants every Jew would have esteemed. Good Jews, however, thought of Samaritans as "half breeds" because they refused to worship at the temple, only obeyed the Pentateuch, and were a semi-Semitic mixture.[61] Yet the Samaritan draws near and touches the Jew in very intimate and tender ways, cleaning wounds and applying healing ointments. The Samaritan takes the Jew to an inn and pays for his healthcare and housing. Jesus seems to be encouraging his followers to get closer to the victimized and ostracized, to "get proximate," and embody his love in real-life situations.[62] Christians cannot only be nice to Samaritan-type people from afar but should build personal relationships and invest in their lives.

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57. Joshua 23:12–13.

58. Isaiah 30:1; Hosea 10:6

59. Matthew 22:39–40.

60. Luke 10:25–37.

61. Clinton E. Arnold, ed, *Acts: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 63-64, Kindle. Jesus' disciples try to call down fire on a Samaritan village in Luke 9:52–56.

62. Bryan Stevenson talks about getting proximate in racial justice talk he gave at Redeemer Presbyterian with Timothy Keller in New York City. "Grace, Justice & Mercy: An evening with Bryan Stevenson & Tim Keller," Center for Faith & Work, May 21, 2016, https://www.redeemer.com/r/grace_and_race.

Jesus gave his followers the Good Samaritan parable to stretch their imaginations of who their neighbors are. He expects his followers to put aside their social, cultural, religious, economic, and political biases to love their neighbors and show compassion to them, whether they are on the radical left or far right. This can be uncomfortable as it forces believers to admit their neighbors are those they might not usually affiliate with, their child's Muslim classmate and her family, the progressive gay couple a few doors down, the conspiracy theorist at the store. Jethani remarks, "The most important thing is not what you decide inside the voting booth, but how you love your neighbors once you leave it."[63]

Like Moses went up to the mountain of Sinai to receive the law, so Jesus went up on a mountain, sat down, and delivered a new law, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Jesus' law fulfills the law of Moses, is its culmination, and redefines it at a higher level.[64] Where once the law said not to commit adultery, Jesus says that to lust after a woman is the same sin.[65] Jesus identifies heart sins to be as wicked as sins acted out. In this new law, Jesus shows what it means to love God and love others. While only Jesus will do so perfectly, he expects Christians to try to obey what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount.[66] When done, the church cultivates human flourishing as believers not only seek their good but the common good of their neighbor.

Love Enemy

When God calls the Israelites to seek the shalom of the Babylonians, he is calling them to love their enemies. Jesus affirms the radical nature of shalom in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:44b when he likewise says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

63. Skye Jethani, *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* (self-published), chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

64. Matthew 5:17–18, 21, 27, 33, 38, 43; 9:16–17.

65. Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Matthew 5:27–30.

66. Matthew 5:19–20; 7:24–27.

you."[67] When others respond with violence and hate, Jesus tells his followers to respond with peace and love. Sprinkle remarks that Matthew 5:44 was like the John 3:16 of the early church.[68] He writes, "A person who chooses to love his or her enemies can have no enemies. That person is left only with neighbors."[69] If a believer feels anger towards politicians or their voters, they can love them by praying for them. 1 Timothy 2:1–2 says, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." Believers can pray for their leaders' wisdom and flourishing as they also pray against their injustices. Scholar Dr. Christopher J. H. Wright writes, "When it comes to wicked leaders, we pray *for* their repentance and salvation, but *against* their policies and practices."[70]

Believers do well to remember that the real battle is spiritual and is not against people, politicians, or partisans. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." No matter what the political pundits may say, a believer's actual battle is unseen. Unfortunately, many have aggrandized policy debates to the level of cosmic battles between heaven and hell. Instead, believers should worry less about politics and pray more for the salvation and transformation of all those involved.

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67. See also Matthew 5:7, 9, 11–12, 21–26, 38–42, 45–48.

68. See Preston Sprinkle, "Nonviolence: The Rhythm of Christianity," YouTube, January 24, 2017, https://youtu.be/sITAH1d1Yk0. John 3:16 is a very popular verse that evangelical Christians memorize and have their children memorize. Early church writers often referenced Matthew 5:44.

69. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 113, Kindle.

70. Christopher J. H. Wright, interview by Christopher Reese, "Our Attraction to Idols Remains the Same, Even When the Names Change," Christianity Today, January 29, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/january-february/idolatry-old-testament-idol-names-change-attraction-remains.html. Emphasis his. He references Isaiah 10:1–2; Jeremiah 6:13–15; Ezekiel 22:26–29; Amos 2:6–7; 5:10, 12; Micah 3:1–3.

A City on a Hill

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus identifies his followers as a new and different kind of community, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."[71] Jesus intended for the Sermon on the Mount to function as a new law for his disciples, a transformative ethic to distinguish the church community and offer hope to the world. Jesus delivered the law on a mountain top to show continuity between his words and Moses's law at Mount Sinai. Jesus is not merely connecting with Sinai but further back to humankind's original state of flourishing in the garden. Genesis says a river flowed from Eden, suggesting a mountain-like setting.[72] Ezekiel confirms, "You were in Eden, the Garden of God . . . you were on the holy mountain of God."[73] Eden is the seed of a city on a hill. When the Holy Spirit helps Christians obey Christ's new ethic, they "Edenize the world," working to restore it to its original state of flourishing.[74] Sprinkle remarks, "Jesus therefore takes the law's incremental steps to the top of the mountain, and the mountaintop looks a lot like Eden."[75] Isaiah 2:2 looks forward to Christ's return:

> It shall come to pass in the latter days
> that the mountain of the house of the Lord
> shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
> and shall be lifted up above the hills;
> and all the nations shall flow to it,

In Revelation, John sees "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."[76] God will dwell with his people in a place that has a mountaintop quality. The New Jerusalem will culminate in "the city on the hill" vision, fully realized in eternity. When

71. Matthew 5:14.

72. Genesis 2:10.

73. Ezekiel 28:13a, 14b.

74. Barron, *Renewing Our Hope*, 211, Kindle.

75. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 112, Kindle.

76. Revelation 2:2b. See also Isaiah 2:1–4; Revelation 21:1–4.

believers live by the Sermon on the Mount ethic today, they recapture a little bit of Eden's flourishing and usher into the present age a little bit of eternity's flourishing too.

This beautiful vision stands in stark contrast to the way America has identified itself as a "city on a hill." John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts and a Puritan, was the first to identify their project as "a city upon a hill."[77] Since him, it has become a popular refrain among Presidents and politicians to identify America as a city on a hill. But there is a problem:

> In the famous sermon titled "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop, its first governor, sketched a vision of the colony as a "city upon a hill." The city was an earthly "new Jerusalem," dedicated to God and to obeying God's laws. Chief among the government's roles was enforcing those laws, including watching over the purity of religious observance. Flogging, mutilations such as cutting off ears or cutting out tongues, and (in cases of adultery, idolatry, and blasphemy) execution were some of the punishments for disobedience.[78]

To identify any nation as "a city on a hill" and yet not operate with Jesus' new ethic is a perversion. To do so is not symbolic of Eden's mountaintop status but is reminiscent of Israel's high places where the people worshiped false gods.[79] No nation can embody Eden except for the church, which can only do so partially until Christ returns. Believers should not think of America as "a city on a hill," as a new kind of Israel, or a Christian nation. America does not operate according to the Sermon on the Mount. It freely uses violence to further its power and control. True flourishing is only possible through believers loving God, neighbors, and enemies.

Speaking Prophetically

What should the church and pastors do when they see the government promoting legislation that hurts the common good and hinders human flourishing? Should believers object?

77. Volf, *Flourishing*, 152, Kindle.

78. Volf, *Flourishing*, 152, Kindle.

79. Leviticus 26:30; Numbers 33:52; 2 Kings 16:4; Isaiah 16:12.

Would staying silent mean disobeying Jesus' command to love neighbor? James 4:17 warns, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." This seems to suggest that at a basic level when believers have the opportunity to oppose harmful legislation and advocate for others, they should do so. To answer these questions more fully, we explore the prophetic ministry of the pastor and the church community.

Pastor as Prophet

In the Old Testament, God called the prophets and anointed them to speak the truth on his behalf, both to Israel and the nations.[80] To Jeremiah, God said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."[81] Jeremiah prophesied to those within the covenant community, Judah and Jerusalem, and those outside the covenant community, Babylon, Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, and others.[82] Jonah tried to flee prophesying to Nineveh, the capitol city of Assyria, but God turned him around in the belly of a fish. While Nineveh repented during Jonah's ministry, they did not do so for Nahum, who later prophesied against them.[83] Amos prophesied against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, Judah, and Israel for their violence, injustice and disobedience.[84] A pastor's calling contains elements of the prophetic ministry, both to the church and culture.[85] The prophets spoke God's will wherever he sent them, "interpreted the times," and brought God's will to bear on their context.[86]

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80. 1 Kings 19:19; Ezekiel 1:3.

81. Jeremiah 1:5. Reformatted for quotation.

82. Jeremiah 25:1–14, 46–51.

83. Nahum 1:1.

84. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 3, 6–8. Also see Obadiah 1:15 for speaking prophetically against Edom.

85. Matthew 14:1–12; Acts 24; Romans 10:9–15; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; 1 Peter 5:1–11.

86. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), chap. 1, Kindle.

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor Dr. Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes, "Pastor-theologians, like prophets, exercise a ministry of truth-telling, primarily (but not exclusively) with words, communicating a God's-eye point of view, especially concerning the truth that is in Christ Jesus."[87] Pastors preach the truth of God's word, point to Christ, and call believers to seek him in complex cultural issues. Christ condemns sin, "challenges [our] party spirit," and yet offers forgiveness and hope through the cross.[88] To preach Christ is to preach prophetically.

A pastor's main priority must always be preaching the gospel, but the gospel in all its fullness. Gospel means "good news," and yet the gospel contains bad news. Sin is rebellion against God and the brokenness it entails at both a personal and systemic level.[89] Every relationship, whether personal, social, economic, biological, political or otherwise, is corrupted. The good news is that Christ has come to redeem all things. Through his innocent life, substitutionary death, life-giving resurrection, and kingly ascension, Jesus offers forgiveness and eternal life to people and also addresses the systemic nature of sin in the world.[90] Salvation is personal yet cosmic. In Romans 8:21, Paul writes, "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." The core of the gospel is the cross, but the scope of the gospel is cosmic. Pastors follow Jesus' prophetic model by preaching a cosmic gospel that addresses personal, corporate, and systemic sins.[91]

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87. Vanhoozer, *The Pastor as Public Theologian***,** chap. "Conclusion," Kindle. See also John 8:31–32.

88. Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 119, Kindle.

89. Mason, *Woke Church*, 117, Kindle. See also Isaiah 64:5; Romans 3:23; Galatians 5:19–21.

90. John 3:16–17; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:20–23; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:3; 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

91. 1 Corinthians 11:1.

The prophets exercised a negative and positive commission as they rebuked sins and called people to God's vision for the world. Evangelical theologian Carl Henry asked a group of "more than one hundred representative evangelical pastors" a question:

> How many of you, during the past six months, have preached a sermon devoted in large part to a condemnation of such social evils as aggressive warfare, racial hatred and intolerance, the liquor traffic, exploitation of labor management or the like – a sermon containing not merely an incidental or illustrative reference, but directed mainly against such evils and proposing the framework in which you think solution is possible?"[92]

The answer? "Not a single hand was raised in response."[93] Carl Henry boldly confronted cultural sins and called for a framework for positive solutions. Likewise, this thesis offers a biblical and theological framework for finding faithful solutions.

However, taking a prophetic stance can be especially difficult if those in the congregation have pre-determined that any political position that does not line up with their own is unbiblical. This problem seems familiar among evangelicals who have aligned themselves so strongly with Republican partisanship that they gloss over some of Jesus' more liberal ideas. Dr. Clay Stauffer, a pastor and the author of *Preaching Politics*, writes:

> Faithfully preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ requires taking bold and prophetic stands when it comes to particular issues and situations. There is a political side to Jesus' life and ministry that cannot be ignored. The dilemma for many preachers is that taking "prophetic" stands that are anti-war, anti-poverty, and that promote social inclusion often lead to a minister being labeled as "liberal." But are such stands liberal, or are they simply biblical?[94]

Pastors can take courage knowing that ultimately they do not answer to their partisan constituents but to the Lord Jesus Christ. While the church's mission limits to what extent

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92. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 4, Google Books. I found quotation at: Richard J. Mouw, "Carl Henry Was Right," Christianity Today, January 27, 2010, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/january/25.30.html.

93. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*, 4.

94. Clay Stauffer, *Preaching Politics: Proclaiming Jesus in an Age of Money, Power, and Partisanship* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press. 2016), chap. 1, Kindle.

pastors and churches should address politics, when the scripture and the Spirit call them to do so, they should do so boldly and in faith. When pastors speak prophetically, often confronting partisanship in the process, they model for their churches how to be prophetic in the world.

The Church's Prophetic Ministry

The church ought to recognize the congregation's general prophetic calling while balancing it with the recognition that God gifts certain people to speak prophetically. In the Old Testament, claiming to be a prophet without a divine calling could result in death.[95] In the New Testament, God gives some the gift of prophecy.[96] Ephesians 4:11–12 says, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." When pastors or members challenge the church or culture through dialogue or preaching, they speak prophetically.

The church itself is also supposed to function as a prophetic counter-culture salt-and-light community. The church sends its members out to speak truth and justice among their families, friends, coworkers, and social contexts.[97] They share the gospel and explain how Christ can transform all of life. God has uniquely gifted and called some to speak truth to power in the public square. He providentially places them where they can exercise just influence. Every local church has a corporate responsibility to speak prophetically in the context where it resides, in the town, state, and even nation, and to equip those gifted and called to prophetic ministry.

But for what should the church advocate? The Old Testament prophets spent much of their time warning the people not to break the law, rather than foretelling the future. They were covenant lawyers. Isaiah condemns Judah for their religious practice while at the same time

95. Deuteronomy 18:20–22.

96. Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28–29.

97. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

oppressing the poor.[98] Those in power abused Jeremiah, not for being anti-idols but for judging their love of wealth and religion while abusing the most vulnerable.[99] Even after the exile, the prophet Zechariah warned the people of the same pattern of religious activity without societal justice.[100] The church needs to care for the poor through hands-on ministry and consider how best to advocate for them. Jim Wallis, an evangelical-left theologian, writes:

> Those most in jeopardy during Washington's debates and decisions are precisely the people the Bible clearly instructs us to protect and care for—the poorest and most vulnerable. In comparison to the power players of the political system, they have virtually no one lobbying on their behalf in these hugely important discussions about how public resources will be allocated.[101]

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul spoke prophetically as he addressed those outside the church. When he preached to the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus, he challenged their idolatry, which girded their power and economic systems.[102] To challenge their worship was to challenge their social fabric. Paul's ministry at Ephesus led to significant financial losses for the city and erupted in a riot.[103] Likewise, when the church critiques its culture's idols today and rightly applies the gospel to all things, it will threaten society's economic and social structures.

A Civil Voice

1 Peter 3:15b exhorts those who bear witness to Christ to "do it with gentleness and respect."[104] It seems as if speaking prophetically has become synonymous with being rude, shouting, and harsh condemnation. James 1:19–20 says, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let

98. Isaiah 58:6–7. See also Amos 2:6–7; 4:1–5; 5:21–24.

99. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 49-50, Kindle.

100. Zechariah 7:5, 9–10.

101. Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 79, Kindle.

102. Acts 17:16–34.

103. Acts 19:1–41.

104. Acts 17:7; 19:9; Romans 13:7; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; James 1:19; 1 Peter 3:15–16.

every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Moore also warns, "The problem with carnal anger and outrage is that it's one of the easiest sins to commit while convincing oneself that one is being faithful. . . . Rage is no sign of authority, prophetic or otherwise."[105] God himself renews his covenant with Israel by declaring himself to be a patient God. Exodus 34:6b says, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." The church demonstrates grace by dialoguing winsomely and with patience. To create "straw man" arguments bears "false witness."[106] Believers can ask good questions and find the truth contained within positions contrary to theirs. In so doing, they honor God.

When believers speak prophetically, they must speak the truth gently and with respect. There may, however, be times when pastors and Christians must interrupt those speaking falsehoods.[107] Generally, evangelical Christians seem quick to extend respect and attentive listening to others, even when they are spreading misinformation or sharing conspiracy theories. Jesus warned that the devil "is a liar and the father of lies."[108] Satan must not be allowed to spread deceit in the church. Part of the prophetic and pastoral ministry is knowing when to interrupt, which takes wisdom, continual prayer, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading.

While this section emphasizes speaking prophetically, the priestly office also matters for those who wish to speak the truth. Theologian Dr. Richard Mouw explains in *Uncommon*

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105. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 2, Kindle. He likens "outraged Christians" to "the prophets of Baal."

106. Exodus 20:16. See Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 60, Kindle.

107. See Phil Vischer, Skye Jethani, Christian Taylor, and Kaitlyn Schiess, "Holy Post Episode 439: Was the Capitol Attack a Christian Insurrection?" *The Holy Post* podcast, January 13, 2021, https://youtu.be/dIw8_zZ3iOo. See also Hart Ramsey, "Interrupting The Conversation When the Enemy Speaks | P. Hart Ramsey & Dr. LaBron Hedgemon," YouTube, June 30, 2020, https://youtu.be/Y5_n9FxfSqI.

108. John 8:44b.

Decency, "Until people have been sure that we have heard and understood their concerns, they probably will not listen to our prophetic messages. . . . Only by approaching them as priests can we hope to relate to them as prophets."[109] Love softens hearts. Pastors and churches can normally speak prophetic truth to the extent they have built relationships. Those receiving the prophetic exhortation need to know they are loved and valued. This matters within the church and externally as well. If a church does not serve its neighbors, it should not expect to have a voice in the community. A genuine relationship aids prophetic faithfulness. Whether a pastor is preaching prophetically at church, a parishioner is speaking prophetically at work, or the church is living prophetically in their city, the ministry always requires civility and love.

Wisdom

While the Bible's wisdom literature addresses flourishing and the common good, I will narrow my focus to defining wisdom, to wise leadership, and to how wisdom shapes policy.

Defining Wisdom

Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." The fear of God is the foundation of all wisdom. Author Jonathan Leeman defines wisdom, "Rather, wisdom is both the posture of fearing the Lord, as well as the skill of living in God's created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing."[110] Volf also defines wisdom as a way of life that lines up with God's design:

> Correspondingly, Christian wisdom in one sense is that faith itself—an overarching interpretation of reality, a set of convictions, attitudes, and practices that direct people in living their lives well. Here "living well" means living as God created human beings to live, rather than living against the grain of their own true reality and the reality of the

109. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 125-126, Kindle.

110. Jonathan Leeman, *How The Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 84, Kindle.

> world. Wisdom in this sense is an integrated way of life that enables the flourishing of persons, communities, and all creation.[111]

Wisdom is living life God's way. Living according to God's designs, even unintentionally, is still wise. Common-grace wisdom can help create the common good.

When reading the old in light of the new, it becomes apparent the personification of wisdom as a woman in Proverbs 8 is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus "was filled with wisdom" and identified himself as the embodiment of lady wisdom, "But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."[112] Proverbs 8 and Colossians 1:15–17 show that Paul identifies Jesus as fulfilling God's wisdom.[113] To meet Christ is to meet full wisdom. Believers receive wisdom through knowing Christ, being a part of the church, and seeing his providential education of their life.[114] To ignore Jesus, however, is to forsake wisdom. Volf writes, "To reject wisdom as a way of life, or Christ as the embodiment of wisdom, is not like leaving the dessert untouched after a good meal; rather, it is like refusing the very nourishment without which human beings cannot truly flourish."[115]

Wise Leadership

God gave Israel and its rulers access to wisdom to help them govern.[116] When God offered King Solomon anything he wanted, he asked for wisdom to govern God's people.[117] As a result, the people recognized "the wisdom of God was in him to do justice."[118] Leeman writes,

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111. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 101, Kindle. Volf also defines wisdom as nuggets of truth and Christ embodied.

112. Matthew 11:19; Luke 2:40.

113. See also John 1:1–14; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:3. See Tremper Longman III, *How To Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), chap 9.

114. James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

115. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*, 102-103, Kindle.

116. Deuteronomy 4:10; 17:18–19; Proverbs 8:15–17; 31:1–9.

117. 1 Kings 3:9.

118. 1 Kings 3:28b.

"Kings, congressmen, ambassadors, generals, police officers, voters, city council members, public school teachers, judges, and juries need wisdom. . . . They need the wisdom of God to do justice."[119] Godly wisdom enables justice. Old Testament scholar Dr. Tremper Longman III connects wisdom with good leaders, "The nation benefits from having leaders who are characterized by the kind of virtues highlighted by the book of Proverbs: humility, temperate speech and emotional expression, a desire for justice and fairness, an openness to listen to advice from wise advisors, a desire to protect the vulnerable, and more."[120] Good government needs wise leadership. While non-Christian government officials might not have biblical wisdom, they may still show a measure of wisdom.[121] Conversely, some politicians may express trust in God to win votes, yet their lives show a lack of wisdom. Their character and actions do not bear the fruit of conforming to Jesus' sermon on the mount ethic. The church must guard against them "linking arms" with the Christian community and can pray for them to gain wisdom or leave office.[122]

Wise Policies & People

Wisdom helps Christians find the common good. Longman explains how the Bible gives believers wisdom principles but not specific policies. Instead, wisdom helps people apply scriptural principles to a particular time and place, finding solutions to the issues they face.

> The Bible will give us essential principles as well as attitudes or dispositions to keep in our minds and hearts as we advocate for and implement particular public policies. But the exact nature of those public policies depends on a host of factors that are connected to the specific concrete historical situation at the time.
>
> To implement the biblical principles relevant to public policy, therefore, requires a knowledge not only of the principles themselves, but also the situation at the moment the policies are being developed, as well as the people involved. The ability to apply the right

119. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 86, Kindle.

120. Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot*, 70-71, Kindle.

121. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 86-87, Kindle.

122. Matthew 7:15–20; 1 Timothy 2:1–2. See earlier section on loving your enemy.

> principle in a way appropriate to a particular situation is what the Bible calls "wisdom."[123]

Much of voting, policy writing, and political engagement comes down to making wise choices. Moving from the Bible to just policy takes wisdom and understanding. Leeman explains how difficult this process can be. He writes, "Christians will disagree and sometimes argue about whether a certain candidate or policy is more or less 'biblical' or at least wise. And what we all need is the wisdom to know whether something is clearly biblical, binding all Christians, or whether it belongs entirely to the domain of Christian freedom."[124] We live in a complex world full of complex problems and motivations. It is easier to make snap judgments than to take the time to understand a problem, position, or person fully. Wisdom, instead, takes time to investigate thoughtfully, process, and make a God-honoring judgment. A more thoughtful approach helps avoid feelings of frustration and hurt, which are so familiar to political discourse.[125] When believers carefully investigate political issues and why others vote and engage the way they do, churches, communities, and relationships will flourish.

The Kingdom of God

In Genesis 2:15b, God commissioned Adam to "work" and "keep" the garden. In Hebrew, "keep" can also mean "guard."[126] Humankind was supposed to rule and protect God's kingdom, but their foe, the serpent, led an insurrection. When Adam and Eve joined the coup, they rejected God's reign and succumbed to Satan as "the ruler of this world."[127] Moore writes,

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123. Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot*, 66, Kindle.

124. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 88-89, Kindle.

125. Stauffer, *Preaching Politics*, chap. 4, Kindle.

126. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Accordance Bible Software, s.v. "שמר," 3:1380. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Jenni-Westermann#12827.

127. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. See also 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19.

"In the biblical story, our primal problem is kinglessness, a kinglessness that has enslaved us to a tyranny we can't even see. Our ancestors were to become kings and queens of the universe, but they surrendered their rule to a dark being, a reptilian invader."[128] The rebellion distorted everything good in the world, corrupting people's love for God and one another. Yet even when God cursed the serpent in Genesis 3:15, he promised rescue. Speaking to the serpent, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."[129] Genesis 3:15 is the "proto-evangelium," the "first good news." God promises to send a descendent of Eve to overthrow Satan's false lordship and restore what was lost. The rest of the scripture tells the story of God's rescue mission to re-instate God's kingdom on earth through a humble and hidden king.

The Promised King

While God himself serves as king of Israel for a time, the people reject God and ask for a human king.[130] God already planned for and defined the type of king they were to have, one from the line of Judah who would fear the Lord and depend on him instead of foreign alliances, military might, or economic prosperity.[131] If this king obeys God's plan, he will reflect God's ultimate rule, and the people will flourish. Skillen writes, "By means of human kingship, when conducted on God's terms, Israel might learn again to know the Lord as their supreme king and themselves as God's royal representatives. In other words, since God was their ultimate king, a just king could mirror God's rule . . ."[132] The king was supposed to be an example of God's rule.

128. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

129. Reformatted for quotation.

130. 1 Samuel 8:6–8.

131. Genesis 49:10a. See Genesis 49:8–12.

132. Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 13, Kindle.

King David commits adultery and causes a civil war, and yet, he is a man after God's own heart and one of the very best kings of Israel.[133] God promises that one of his descendants will be an eternal king.[134] The promised king will bring peace, shalom, and human flourishing. Solomon falls short of God's plans, as do all the kings of Israel and Judah. Isaiah foretells that the only king who can obey God and re-establish his rule on the earth is God himself. God promises a child who is "Mighty God" and "Prince of Peace" and "of his government and of peace there will be no end."[135] Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus' lineage to David, Abraham, and Luke's account, "Adam, the son of God."[136]

Before his ministry begins, Satan tempts Jesus to receive the kingdom by allegiance to him instead of the Father. Luke 4:5–7 says, "And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus rejects the serpent. While Satan has limited dominion over the earth under God's ultimate rule over all things, he has no rule over Jesus who declares, "the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me."[137] Jesus has not come to serve the serpent or rule one nation but to usher in God's kingdom reign over all things. In Jesus' final temptation, Satan quotes Psalm 91:11–12. The next verse, Psalm 91:13, says, "You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample

133. 1 Samuel 13:14; 2 Samuel 11:3–4; 13:21–22, 28, 39.

134. 2 Samuel 7:16.

135. Isaiah 9:6–7a.

136. Luke 3:38.

137. John 14:30b. See also Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle. And see Daniel 4:17; Romans 13:1.

underfoot." Satan's choice of Psalm recalls Genesis 3:15.[138] Jesus is the promised rescuer and king, who, though wounded at the cross, crushes the serpent's head.

A Different Kind of Kingdom

Many Jews thought the Messiah, God's "anointed one," would be a militaristic king who would violently overthrow their Roman captors and restore Israel's statehood.[139] Later, when Jesus parades into Jerusalem, his disciples wave palm branches, symbolizing Jewish identity and nationalism.[140] But the Messiah has come to bring good news to the poor, the imprisoned, the disabled, and the spiritually and socially oppressed.[141] Moore explains how Jesus' declaration in Luke 4 of "the year of Jubilee" defines Jesus' ultimate plan of kingdom restoration.[142]

> The Jubilee year of Israel signified that the existing power structures would not always be as they are, that God would turn all things upside down. Isaiah, writing to a people weary of war and exile, spoke of a Jubilee that wouldn't be part of the cycle of a century, but a new and lasting order. This would be ushered in by one who God would anoint. That language "anointing" is kingly talk. . . . In the reign of the coming anointed ruler, the prisoners would find freedom, the blind would find sight, the poor would find hope, and, most important of all, the favor of God would rest again on his people.[143]

When Jesus introduced his Messianic mission to his hometown, Nazareth, at first, they "spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words."[144] But when Jesus says the Jewish people will reject him while outsiders, the Gentiles, will welcome him, his hometown tries to kill him.[145]

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138. Terry Iles, "The Certain Gospel: The Temptation of Jesus | Luke 4:1-13," January 9, 2018, https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/the-certain-gospel-the-temptation-of-jesus-luke-41-13/.

139. The Prophet Samuel anointed Saul and David when God appointed them king (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13). Messiah means "anointed one" and is translated as "Christ" in the Greek.

140. David E. Garland, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke,* ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Luke 19:36, Kindle.

141. "'The poor' is a key term in Luke. It refers to the pious poor and indicates Jesus' desire to reach out to those the world tends to forget or mistreat." Eric Mason, *Woke Church*, 121, Kindle. See also Luke 4:18–19, 43.

142. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

143. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

144. Luke 4:22. See also Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

145. Luke 4:20–30.

They want the power and privilege of the kingdom on their terms, for their nation. But Jesus offers the kingdom, eternal human flourishing, to the least deserving.

The type of kingdom Jesus is establishing flips the world's expectations upside-down. In the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:17–49, Jesus promises good to the hungry, those who weep, and those persecuted for his sake. Stauffer writes:

> From Luke's Sermon on the Plain, we can make some initial conclusions about the politics of Jesus. He was an advocate for the poor and the hungry. He cared for those who were sad and shared in their plight. He stood firm with those who were persecuted for being his followers. He was wary of systems that favored the rich while taking advantage of the poor. He challenged his followers to love their enemies, pray for their persecutors, turn the other cheek, and treat others the way they would want to be treated. He opened up the possibility that God's Kingdom will look nothing like the kingdoms of this world.[146]

The distinctive nature of Christ's kingdom is especially evident as Jesus heads to Calvary. When Jesus' disciple Peter declares, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," he identifies Jesus as the Messiah.[147] But Peter does not understand the Messiah's kingdom or mission. When Jesus predicts he must suffer, die, and rise again, Peter rebukes him, for which Jesus identifies Peter with Satan.[148] Satan's kingdom is militaristic and nationalistic, but Jesus built the kingdom of God on "self-sacrificial love," even to the point of death.[149] Jesus now calls believers to deny themselves, pick up their crosses, and follow his radical way of living in the world.[150]

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146. Stauffer, *Preaching Politics*, chap. 2, Kindle. See also the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.

147. Matthew 16:16.

148. Matthew 16:21–23.

149. Gregory Boyd, The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 32, Kindle.

150. Matthew 16:24–26.

The Reign of Christ

Jesus' lordship challenges all earthly lordships and kingdoms. When Pilate asks Jesus if he is the Jews' king, Jesus does not limit his kingdom by geographic or nationalistic boundaries, "My kingdom is not of this world."[151] Instead, he claims power over everything, saying, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above."[152] Skillen explains how Jesus challenges Pilate, "The mission of Jesus is to show both the Roman and the Jewish authorities that it is God alone who holds ultimate authority over them and holds them accountable to the terms of God's kingdom."[153] He further writes:

> If Jesus had been preaching the arrival of a kingdom that had nothing to do with this world, a kingdom removed from "real politics," then neither the Jewish nor the Roman authorities would have been so upset with him. To the contrary, however, the claims that Jesus was making had to do with God's lordship over all kingdoms on earth, over every human authority in this world.[154]

Jesus challenges earthly authorities, and so earthly authorities crucify him. [155] This crucifixion, however, is actually his enthronement.[156] The soldiers make Jesus wear a crown of thorns and a royal purple robe.[157] Above the cross, Pilate hangs a sign that reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."[158] Isaiah 52:13 promised Jesus would be "high and lifted up" and "exalted." At the cross, Jesus is instated as king, but not just over the Romans, but over all things, even sin and death, not won through violence and war, but through sacrifice and suffering. Forty days after his

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151. John 18:33, 36.

152. John 19:11.

153. Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 9, Kindle.

154. Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 9, Kindle. See also Acts 17:7.

155. "When Paul hails Jesus as Lord and Savior, we need to hear a faint first-century echo: Caesar is not." Preston Sprinkle, *Fight*, 123, Kindle.

156. Jon Collins and Tim Mackie, "Gospel of The Kingdom," YouTube, February 19, 2016, https://youtu.be/xmFPS0f-kzs.

157. John 19:2.

158. John 19:19.

resurrection, Jesus ascends to heaven's throne to rule and reign with his Father.[159] Christ does not claim America or any other nation as uniquely his. Rather, he rules over all nations, kingdoms, and powers, and he has come to rescue and redeem each one.

Author, pastor, and evangelical leader Dr. Timothy Keller summarizes theologian Dr. Geerhardus Vos understanding of the kingdom of God:

> Vos helpfully observes in the Bible three aspects of the kingdom that must be kept together. First, it is the realm of God's saving grace. Because salvation is by grace, not works, God is King and Sovereign of our salvation. Second, it is the realm of righteousness and justice. A kingdom always operates according to the norms of the King. So the kingdom of God is a new way of living and new set of relationships and social arrangements. Third, it is the realm of blessing and joy. God's future power, which renews all creation, is present in our lives now.[160]

Christ's kingdom is bent on world domination, but not by force, but by salvation and grace, righteousness and justice, renewed relationships, and a flourishing future. Enemies of God become citizens of this kingdom by confessing their rebellion and giving total allegiance to Christ's reign.[161] In Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, a type of pledge of allegiance to his new kingdom: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." These new subjects, empowered by the Spirit, live according to Christ's kingdom ethic. While some, confused by Christian nationalism, try to use political power to make the world conform to Christ's rule, "the Christian's goal is not to strive to rule, but to be ruled."[162]

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159. Psalm 110:1; Mark 14:62; Acts 1:3; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2.

160. See Geerhardus Vos, The Teachings of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 162-163, quoted in Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 229, 234.

161. Mark 1:14b–15; Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21.

162. Charles Colson, *God and Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), chap. 6, Kindle.

Already but not yet

The kingdom of God lives in a "now but not yet" tension. When a Pharisee asked Jesus, "when the Kingdom of God would come," he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, . . . behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."[163] Jesus was pointing to himself as the kingdom embodied, which he demonstrated through his preaching and miracles. As Moore writes, ". . . Jesus *is* the kingdom."[164] And yet, the kingdom is not fully manifest and is still a future event: "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return."[165] Longman explains, "Christians should understand that they live in the already–not yet. God through Christ has already won the victory, but the victory is not yet completed. To use another biblical metaphor, the kingdom is already with us but not yet fully realized."[166] Pastor and theologian Dr. Gregory Boyd explains further:

> Now, through his death and resurrection, Jesus accomplished the task for which he came. He defeated the kingdom of darkness and set humanity free. In principle, therefore, the world has already been reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:14–21; Col. 1:15–20). In principle, the wall of sin that separates humanity along ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and tribal lines has been destroyed. In principle, all have already died in Adam and been made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14). In principle, we are already one new humanity in Christ (Eph. 2:14–15). In principle. Yet Scripture as well as our own experience make it painfully clear that what is true in principle has not yet been manifested as accomplished fact (see, for example, Heb. 2:8).[167]

This tension is like that in Genesis 1–3. God created government to be good in Genesis 1, but due to the fall in Genesis 3, government is not all it could be. Now, there is hope and possibility for good through the gospel's ability to save souls and renew society because of the cross.

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163. Luke 17:20–21.

164. Moore, *Onward*, chap 2, Kindle. Emphasis his.

165. Luke 19:12b.

166. Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot*, 65, Kindle. See also Matthew 12:29; Revelation 20:1–3, 7–10.

167. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 67-68, Kindle.

However, because Christ is not currently reigning on earth, believers will often fall short of attaining the fullness of Christ's goodness in this present order. What then should they do? *Political Theology* author Elizabeth Phillips asks a very relevant question:

> So long as the kingdom of God exists for us as an already-but-not-yet reality, that is until Jesus returns, the church is perpetually faced with this question: If God is the only true king, if the church is in any sense the body on earth which represents the reign of Christ at the right hand of God the Father, and if human government is in any sense part of God's plan for the ordering of human life, what then is the relationship between church and government?[168]

The already but not yet creates tension for how Christians are to engage with politics. Believers should not act like the kingdom is fully manifest, which would be an over-realized eschatology, but they should also engage in civic duty with hope and confidence in Christ's reign. Moore explains some potential problems with the already but not yet:

> Those who mistakenly bring the kingdom too near (already) fall for utopianism, unrealistic expectations, politicized gospels, or, worst of all, the persecution of those who don't yet believe or who don't see things the same way. Those who keep the kingdom too distant (not yet) fall for prophecy chart fixations or cultural apathy or failed attempts to withdraw from society.[169]

Believers who want Christian nationalism, who believe America to be a Christian nation, or want it to become so, unintentionally place too much emphasis on the already. They, admirably, want to see God's kingdom come on this earth, but no nation will embody the eternal kingdom before Christ's return. Believers who also believe enough liberal social programs can create a perfect society, "utopia," have likewise forgotten that God's kingdom has not yet come in its fullness.

Pastors and churches need to help believers live in that space between the already and not yet. Moore writes, "The kingdom comes in two stages, because King Jesus himself does. The

168. Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2012), 57, Kindle.

169. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

kingdom doesn't come initially with the shock and awe of exploding Eastern skies, but in secret, hidden ways. It comes like yeast working its way through a loaf of bread or a seed germinating in the ground, or, in fact, like an embryo stirring in a virgin's womb."[170] When believers act like kingdom-people, even in small Christ-centric ways, they help usher in a vast kingdom.

The Church and the Kingdom

Prior to Christ's return, the kingdom of God is made most evident in churches. Moore adds a clarification, "So if Jesus does not yet rule the world, where does he rule? He rules, in the present age, over his church (Eph. 1:22–23). The church is a signpost of God's coming kingdom (Eph. 3:10), a preview to the watching world of what the reign of God in Christ is to look like, a colony of the kingdom coming."[171] Leeman writes, "we are embassies of that kingdom, outposts of Christ's rule scattered about the nations."[172] While Jesus is actively ruling from the throne, he is not yet leading this world in person. He manifests his rule in the church, which does not rule over cities or states, but bears witness to Christ's reign. Moore writes:

> We do not, the apostles tell us, presently rule over the world (2 Cor. 4:4). Instead, Jesus reigns over us by his voice, in the right preaching of the Word. He reigns over us by marking out the boundaries of our fellowship, in baptism, in the Lord's Table, and in discipline. In the church, God has created an embassy of the kingdom of Christ, appealing to the outside world to be reconciled to the coming kingdom, and modeling what this kingdom will look like. We do not live kingless lives, but we are being shaped and formed, and prepared to rule, within the life of Christ's church. At the same time, we know that we do not yet rule over those on the outside.[173]

While the church is not a geopolitical nation, it is a colony of the kingdom, an outpost, an embassy. The church is a political body. Schiess, quoting Mark Seifrid's *Pillar* commentary,

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170. Moore, Onward, chap. 3, Kindle.

171. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

172. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 144, Kindle.

173. Moore, *Onward*, chap. 3, Kindle.

defines the Greek word for church, "The use of the word ekklēsia is our first indication that this community is a political one. It is 'striking that the earliest Christians chose a distinctively political . . . term for their collective existence, speaking of themselves as an ekklēsia, a public assembly, rather than as a 'religious gathering' ('synagogue').'"[174] The church's ministry and witness embody Christ's politics for today, not political victories at elections. The church cannot be partisan and seek whole community flourishing at the same time. Schiess continues, "The church is a political body in that it is interested in the common good and not in the sense that it is a political party with members to represent. . . . Christians make political decisions based on what will protect them and their interests. But the church is commissioned to seek the flourishing of our communities, not special privileges for ourselves."[175] When the church understands itself as a distinct political entity, it will do a better job of resisting partisan temptations and will engage in service to the poor, fulfilling Jesus' mission from Luke 4.

Believers should also distinguish between the church gathered and the church scattered, the institutional organization, and the organic church body.[176] Each embodies the kingdom of God in different ways in this world. Keller writes, "Vos teaches that the kingdom of God mainly operates through the church, but that it also operates through Christians who integrate their faith and their work. . . . Vos immediately makes it clear, however, that the institutional church should not have political power or control society through the state."[177] The church should equip people to live out their faith in the public square in government and positions of influence. Keller writes, "So Vos states, in summary, that (1) the main way to see the kingdom forces of God at work is in

174. Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians, Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 7, quoted in Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 96, Kindle.

175. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 96-97, Kindle.

176. Keller, *Center Church*, 240-241.

177. Vos, *The Teachings of Jesus*, 162-163, quoted in Keller, *Center Church*, 229-230, 234.

the institutional church, whose main job is to minster through the Word and sacrament to win people and disciple them in Christ, and (2) when Christians are living in society to God's glory, this, too, is a manifestation of the kingdom of God."[178] When the church body gathers to worship and do discipleship, it is a political gathering. When it sends its people out into the world to be ambassadors for Christ, it is a political sending. Both are the kingdom.

Christian Citizenship

Paul identifies believers' citizenship with the kingdom of God. Philippians 3:20b says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Sprinkle explains that when Paul writes to Philippi, he writes to a highly patriotic city full of "Roman military veterans."[179] But he challenges their zeal for Rome and reorients it to Christ.

> . . . Paul commands them, "Live out your citizenship [polistheuamai] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27, author's translation). Some translations interpret this command as "walk in a manner worthy" rather than "live out your citizenship in a manner worthy," but the Greek word polistheuamai does not simply mean "walk" or "live" but has to do with citizenship. Even if you don't know Greek, you can probably tell that the word polistheuamai has something to do with politics. The word contains the root polis, which means "city" and gives us words like politics and metropolis. Polistheuamai is a verb, so it means something like "act like a citizen," "be a good citizen," or "live out your citizenship" as I translated it above.[180]

Believers should reorient their lives to their heavenly citizenship by not finding so much personal identity in their nation-state. Due to shared heavenly citizenship, "We have more in common with Christians in other nations—nations our country may war against—than we do with neighbors who share the same passport."[181] In Christ, Christian citizens are a global people.

178. Keller, *Center Church*, 230.

179. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 120-122, Kindle.

180. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 121, Kindle.

181. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 100, Kindle.

God calls believers to pray for their leaders and obey the law of the land out of loyalty to him, not out of loyalty to the country.[182] Patriotism, defined as a general sense of appreciation and gratitude for the country and the freedoms it affords, can be helpful, even biblical. Georgetown University International Affairs professor Dr. Paul D. Miller defines patriotism:

> Christians should recognize that patriotism is good because all of God's creation is good and patriotism helps us appreciate our particular place in it. Our affection and loyalty to a specific part of God's creation helps us do the good work of cultivating and improving the part we happen to live in. As Christians, we can and should love the United States—which also means working to improve our country by holding it up for critique and working for justice when it errs.[183]

Thankfulness for the country can help believers work towards human flourishing and the common good wherever they reside. But as citizens of heaven, a believer's local citizenship and sense of patriotism should never excuse or ignore their nation's failures. Instead, they should call for prophetic change. United Church of Christ clergy member and unflinching activist William Sloane Coffin famously remarked, "There are three kinds of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad ones are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their country, a reflection of God's lover's quarrel with all the world."[184]

Patriotism, however, is different from nationalism. Nationalism prioritizes a particular people group over others, often at the expense of the common good. Christian citizenship is also not to be confused with Christian nationalism, which believes America is a Christian nation and that "Christianity should enjoy a privileged position in the public square."[185] This perspective

182. Romans 13:1.

183. Paul D. Miller, "What Is Christian Nationalism?" Christianity Today, February 3, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html.

184. William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 84.

185. Miller, "What Is Christian Nationalism?" Christianity Today.

downsizes the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation to a small localized religion.[186] Previous Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Dr. Bruce Riley Ashford explains how Christian citizenship is helpful to a nation: "To the extent that we truly do acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we will engage the Caesar before us with compassion, respect, and wisdom, speaking and acting in ways that contribute to the common good. In other words, the more we pledge allegiance to Christ, the better citizens of the United States of America we'll become."[187] Christians can gratefully acknowledge their local citizenship as a God-given opportunity to seek the common good in a particular time and place. Yet they do this even as they fully identify as citizens of heaven under Christ's lordship, pledging allegiance to his kingdom above all else.

The Great Commission

At the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry, he gave his disciples "The Great Commission." Matthew 28:18–20 says, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Jesus first establishes his authority over all things. His lordship serves as the foundation for all missionary and discipleship efforts but also for seeking human flourishing and the common good. Just like God gave humankind the authority to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1, now king Jesus calls his disciples to be fruitful and multiply, establishing a new creation of

186. See Volf, *Flourishing*, 84-86, Kindle.

187. Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018), chap. 3, Kindle.

kingdom people operating by Christ's kingdom ethic.[188] When believers humbly and winsomely serve Christ and share his gospel, wherever he places them, humans should flourish.

Hunter sees social applications in Christ's sending of his disciples:

> Jesus calls his followers to "go into all the world" (Mark 16:15). This, of course, has long been interpreted geographically—the call of missionaries to go to faraway places to proclaim the good news and to make disciples. But the great commission can also be interpreted in terms of social structure. The church is to go into all realms of social life: in volunteer and paid labor—skilled and unskilled labor, the crafts, engineering, commerce, art, law, architecture, teaching, health care, and service.[189]

Jesus calls believers to go into all the world, every sphere, every place, every vocation, and make disciples, teaching them to love God and others.[190] The great commandment is the heart of the great commission.[191] A social interpretation of the mission provides believers with the hope that they can work to their community, state, and nation's flourishing in almost any part of society.

The great commission is not just for sending missionaries to faraway places to tell others about Jesus, but for helping everyday disciples follow Jesus where he already has them. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary professor Dr. John Jefferson Davis writes, "We also need to notice that the commission to 'teach' (Matt. 28:20) explicitly focuses not, in the first instance, on belief, but rather on behavior: 'teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.'"[192] The great commission calls believers to obey Jesus in all of life, seeking to put his self-sacrificial teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and the gospels into application in their contexts.

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188. See "Gospel Saturation Primer," catapult.group, p 15, accessed February 13, 2021, https://christtogether.org/shared-resources/Christ%20Together%20Gospel%20Saturation%20Primer.pdf.

189. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 256-257, Kindle. Mark 16:9–20 is not in the earliest known manuscripts. I see the same understanding applying to Matthew 28:16–20.

190. See "Abraham Kuyper" in chapter 3. The great commandment is the heart of the great commission.

191. Matthew 22:34–40.

192. John Jefferson Davis, "Slow Discipleship and the End of Christendom," In *Revisiting' Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later*, edited by Collin Hansen (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Slow [. . .].", Kindle.

Church Community

Any discussion of human flourishing and the common good falls short without reviewing the early church. Here, believers encounter an example of a flourishing community committed to Christ and the common good. The New Testament author Luke describes the first church in Jerusalem in Acts 2:42–45:

> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

The Greek word for "common" is koinos, which here means "belonging equally to several."[193] The Jerusalem believers are sacrificing for each other to seek the good of their Christian community. Koinos can also mean "profane" or "unclean."[194] Seeking the common good is messy and challenging, yet God honors believers who care for each other. Meador points out the communal nature of the common good, "The idea of a common good is that it is a good that only can be enjoyed in common with others."[195] Together, the church body is experiencing a common life that benefits them and is a witness to their community. Acts 2:47b adds, ". . . having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Throughout early church history, Christians demonstrated a counter-cultural flourishing community that was attractive to their city.[196]

193. *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Accordance, "κοινός," paragraph 8470, https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#8470.

194. *Mounce Greek Dictionary, Accordance*, "κοινός," paragraph 8470, https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#8470.

195. Meador, *In Search of the Common Good*, 115, Kindle.

196. See The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, "Chapter 5: The manners of the Christians."

Faith, Not Fear

Throughout the Bible, a common and recurring command is to live by faith and not give in to worry, anxiety, or fear. Today's evangelical Christians have struggled with fear influencing their political engagement. Author and historian Dr. John Fea remarks, "Despite the biblical passages exhorting followers of Christ to 'fear not,' it is possible to write an entire history of American evangelicalism as the story of Christians who have failed to overcome fear."[197] Many who do not have believer's Christlikeness in mind, but rather their evangelical voting power, can and have used fear to motivate Christians to support their political agendas.

Boyd writes of the way evangelical Christians often engage in politics. He says, "A lot of this sort of 'sky is falling' rhetoric is going around these days. While often spoken sincerely, it instills fear in many Christians. It is also used to motivate them to support certain political positions, policies, and candidates as the last, best hope left to the church and to America itself."[198] This fear creates allegiance to partisanship rather than thoughtful political engagement. This fear often focuses on the outside world and those followers of Christ who dare to take a different posture. Jethani addresses those who seek the way of faith and flourishing:

> You must understand, if they are full of fear and anger toward the culture and you are not, they will either dismiss you as too stupid to recognize the great threats in front of you, or they will despise you as complicit in the depravity of the culture they are trying to flee or fight. . . . Far too many Christians find unity in their fears rather than in their faith in Christ.[199]

Although challenging, pastors and churches have an opportunity to disciple believers away from this historical pattern of fear and towards a more Christ-like manner of public faith.

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197. John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), chap. 3, Kindle.

198. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, chap. 9, Kindle.

199. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

Fear vs. Faith

Fear was not God's original intention but a result of the fall.[200] We recognize two directions fear can take in the Bible: fear of man or fear of God. Fear of man, while common, often leads to sin or is a result of sin and is a sign of misplaced focus.[201] Fear of God, however, is a sign of wisdom.[202] The Bible encourages God's people to have a healthy fear of God, respect, faith, and trust for who he is and what he can do.[203] Fear of God helps overcome fear of man.[204]

The Bible calls God's people not to be afraid of other people or circumstances.[205] In Deuteronomy 31:8, Moses commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land, "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Israel had a special mandate to walk in faith and not fear, as long as they walk in God's ways instead of man's. Likewise, the Christian community has a special mandate to live by faith as they follow Jesus.[206] Jesus told his followers not to be anxious, even for basic necessities. If God takes care of birds and flowers, he will take care of them.[207]

Jesus' solution to anxiety is not self-preservation but God's kingdom. Jesus continues in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." This command helps believers obey Jesus' other difficult commands, such as not resisting evil with evil or loving their enemies and praying for them.[208] Fear produces

200. Genesis 3:10.

201. Genesis 42:35; Exodus 2:14; Judges 6:27; Proverbs 29:25; Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 13:6.

202. Exodus 1:17; Leviticus 19:14; Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7.

203. Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:24; 8:6; 10:12–13; 13:4; Matthew 10:28.

204. Psalm 23.

205. Psalm 56:3; Isaiah 43:1.

206. Romans 14:23.

207. Matthew 6:25–34.

208. See Matthew 5:38–48.

selfishness at the cost of flourishing.[209] But Jesus promises to sanctify those who have faith in him, which means drawing them out of fear's grip. Schiess writes, "Our fear easily isolates and pits us against each other in a contest for security and safety, and God continually commands us not to fear but to trust in Him, the Creator and sustainer of the community into which we were called."[210] Faith helps believers turn from partisanship to caring for the common good.

Jesus himself is the foundation for courage, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."[211] Paul later reminds the church at Philippi, a church marked by persecution, of the Lordship of Jesus and exhorts them not to be anxious. He says, "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything. . ."[212] Christ is Lord and Savior, no matter the political circumstances. As one person put it, "Whoever becomes President, Jesus remains King."[213]

The Bible does call believers to have a healthy fear of the government but defines this fear as submission and roots it in fear of God and his wrath towards sin. Romans 13:3–4 says:

> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

God gives the state the use of a police force within its jurisdiction to promote the common good and punish violations. Believers are to submit to government, but only as it comes under God's just authority. Sprinkle writes, "Paul does not use one of the typical Greek words for 'obey' here. He deliberately uses the term submit. The difference is that Christians 'obey' the law of Christ.

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209. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 33, Kindle.

210. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 52, Kindle.

211. Mark 6:50.

212. Philippians 4:5b–6. See also Acts 16:16–40; Philippians 1:12–26; 2:5–11.

213. Unknown author quoted in: Eugene Cho, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2020), chap. "Thou Shalt Not Fear," Kindle.

They receive their moral marching orders from their King. And insofar as the laws of the state don't conflict with the law of Christ, they obey."[214] What if the government threatens believers' rights to share the gospel or worship? What if it persecutes Christians? Boyd answers, "Instead of fearing the possibility of persecution someday, kingdom people should trust that if this happened, God would use it for the furthering of his kingdom, just as he used Jesus' death."[215]

Love casts out fear

To overcome fear and walk by faith, believers can ask God for the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22–23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." This fruit, received through abiding in Christ, casts out fear and reorient believers' hearts and emotions.[216] When believers find their identity and worth in the Father's love for them, it enables them to love those who reject them. Boyd writes:

> Because our source of worth, significance, and security is found exclusively in God's love and God's reign, not our own immediate well-being, and because we believe in the resurrection, we are empowered to love even those who threaten our well-being—for this does not threaten our essential worth, significance, and security. We are, therefore, not to fear them (see 1 Peter 3:14–18). If we do fear them, it is only because some element of our essential worth, significance, and security is rooted in what they threaten. In other words, fear is an indication that we are living in idolatry, not love.[217]

God's love, then, frees believers to respond to partisanship and political threats with compassion and love. 1 John 4:18a says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." God loved his enemies before they loved him, which should enable believers to do the same.[218]

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214. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 132, Kindle.

215. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 181, Kindle.

216. John 15:4–5; 1 Corinthians 13:13.

217. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 180, Kindle.

218. 1 John 4:18–20.

Revelation

The end of the Bible is the beginning of eternal and complete human flourishing. The common good will no longer be just a longed-for ideal but an established reality. Christianity's understanding of eschatology, the end of the story, changes how believers live today.

The End Matters

If Christians believe that when they die, they will proceed to heaven, never to return, or that God will destroy the earth after a special rapture, there is no need to improve the world. Well-intentioned believers have interpreted passages like 2 Peter 3:10b, ". . . both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up,"[219] and 1 Thessalonians 4:17a, "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" in ways that emphasize Christians exiting the world.[220] There will be another exodus of believers, but to go and greet the Lord in the air, then return with him as the crowds did at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, this time into the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and earth.[221] New Testament scholar Dr. N.T. Wright says, ". . . [Paul] recalls what happens when an emperor or grand official pays a state visit to a city or province. The leading citizens, seeing him coming, go out to meet him in the open country in order then to escort him royally into the city."[222]

This misunderstanding of the end of the story as a type of "emergency exit" has hindered human flourishing. Schiess writes, "A general disposition of apathy toward material suffering can be justified by appealing to a coming destruction of the earth."[223] This vision of the future

219. (NKJV). See Meador, *In Search of the Common Good*, 174, Kindle.

220. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 172-174, Kindle.

221. Matthew 21:1–11; Revelation 21:1–2.

222. N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2018), 221, Kindle.

223. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 172, Kindle.

can create inertia and a lack of compassion. If all that matters is the spiritual, and this earth has no eternal value, why work towards the common good? This unimaginative fire and brimstone future is not compelling.[224]

The church needs a fresh vision of eternity. Phillips explains how Revelation helps believers see the world differently, "If apocalyptic is not a revelation of specific future events but an imaginative vision of the future which functions to jolt us out of our status-quo perceptions and see current social reality for what it truly is in relation to God, our ways of knowing are newly opened, not dangerously closed."[225] In other words, Revelation's vision of the end helps believers live more faithfully today. Dr. Richard Bauckham, a scholar known for his work in Revelation, affirms this approach, "The visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of how the world is and will be."[226] Revelation helps Christians see a vision of flourishing and work towards it.

Good Work Matters

Work is both a pre-fall and post-restoration reality.[227] So much of humanity's understanding and love-hate relationship with work is bound up in its post-fall nature, how hard and fruitless it can be due to the curse.[228] It can be tempting, then, to believe that nothing believers do besides church or missions ministry matters in the end. If, on the other hand, God will redeem, restore, and renovate this world, keep good things, remove bad things, and create

224. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 172-174, Kindle.

225. Philips, *Political Theology*, 148, Kindle.

226. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 1, Kindle.

227. Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 14:13; 22:3.

228. Genesis 3:17–19.

entirely new things, all of today's work matters.[229] Revelation promises a "new heaven and new earth," but this is really a renewal, restoring everything to its best and most beautiful form.

There is hope; even assurance, the good work believers do in this life, whatever it may be, whether it lasts in this world or not, has a lasting quality. Schiess writes, "We are working on earth with the knowledge that every true work of human flourishing, done in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a preview of the day that God's good creation is redeemed."[230] 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." When God receives what believers do as an act of worship, it glorifies him, and that glory will manifest in eternity in whatever form God sees fit. Volf writes:

> Finally, God makes sure that none of what is true, good, and beautiful in our work will be lost. In God, everything that we have done in cooperation with God will be preserved. . . . The results of our work—the cumulative results of generations of workers across the globe—will also be preserved in the world to come. They may be preserved just in God's memory, or they may be preserved as actual building blocks of that new world.[231]

How exactly God will carry what believers do in this lifetime into eternity has yet to be unveiled. Revelation 14:13b says, ". . . they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Work that contributes to the common good and cultivates human flourishing has eternal worth.

The Polis Matters

The Greek word "polis" means "city" and is the root word from which "politics" originates. Politics, then, is caring about the city, the local community the church inhabits, no matter how big or small, whether urban, suburban, or rural.[232] It is tempting to invest the most time and effort into national politics, which are often the most attention-grabbing, yet most

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229. See Stephen Witmer, *Eternity Changes Everything* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2014), 17-23, Kindle.

230. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 177, Kindle.

231. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 35-36, Kindle. Volf references Revelation 14:13.

232. Jethani defines politics similar to this way on *The Holy Post* podcast.

people have the least ability to affect. God first calls believers to seek shalom in their local polis, the communities in which he has intentionally placed them, to be "ambassadors for Christ."[233]

Revelation is a thoroughly religious yet political letter.[234] It has many pictures of cities, starting with the letters to the seven churches identified with the seven cities they inhabit. Later God vanquishes Babylon, an archetypal city representing the nations' vices, injustices, and misused powers.[235] Finally, God ushers in the New Jerusalem, a forever city, to house his presence and the people Christ loves. Bauckham notes, "the New Jerusalem represents the true fulfillment of the ideal of the city, a city truly worth belonging to."[236] Revelation's new and forever city will realize our deepest political hopes and dreams. Schiess expands its perfection even further, "Revelation 21 describes a new Jerusalem, a well-ordered city that represents human flourishing and creativity in all its fullness: perfect relationship with our Creator, perfect freedom to work for the common good, and the perfectly governed human community."[237] Revelation 21:1–4 describes the glories of Christ's perfect city:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

God made people for a relationship with him and through him to experience true human flourishing. Due to the fall, however, humanity lost the ability to experience what God intended.

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233. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

234. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, chap. 1, Kindle.

235. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, chap. 6, Kindle.

236. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, chap. 6, Kindle.

237. Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics*, 65, Kindle.

Now finally, God has come to know and be known in a face-to-face relationship, "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."[238] There is no temple because God dwells within the city and all of creation.[239] God has come to rule and care for his creation, restoring true human flourishing and wiping away all sorrows and pains, even death itself.

God has prepared this city while at the same time accounting for man's work. Bauckham continues, "True, it is given by God and so comes down from heaven. But this does not mean humanity makes no contribution to it. It consummates human history and culture insofar as these have been dedicated to God (cf. 21:12, 14, 24, 26), while excluding the distortions of history and culture into opposition to God that Babylon represents (cf. 21:8, 27; 22:15)."[240] Through their engagement with their cities and in their nations, believers have the opportunity to somehow and mysteriously contribute to the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:24, 26 says, "By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, . . . They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations." Meador explains:

> Thus we might say that the glory of humans refers to the things they have made and the things they have dominion over. So when we speak of the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the eternal city, it is not a stretch to think that this refers to the works of their hands and presumably the works of their nations. So, the good things we create today will, in some sense, be with us in the eternal city.[241]

When believers seek the good of their cities through the common good, they can trust that this, too, will count eternally.

While Genesis opens in a vibrant garden in a flourishing world, Revelation ends in a city, but not just any city, a garden-city filled with human flourishing. Just like "A river flowed out of

238. Revelation 22:4.

239. Revelation 21:22. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, chap. 6, Kindle.

240. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, chap. 6, Kindle.

241. Meador, *In Search of the Common Good*, 178, Kindle.

Eden to water the garden," and from there the earth, so a river flows from God's throne through this second Eden, giving life to the polis, the city.[242] Revelation 22:1–2a says, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city."

Here, at last, is a believer's ultimate hope. This is not just a vision of what may happen but what will happen. God has made possible true human flourishing through the death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus, the sacrificial lamb seated on the throne in Revelation. God will see it through to completion at his appointed time. He will redeem the world, establish a perfect government, and heal his people. While there is tension between what currently is and what will be one day, there is hope and confidence that God will complete his work. Wheaton College professor Dr. Vincent Bacote explains how this helps believers trust more in God:

> In the meantime, it is our task to trust God to bring about the final end without confusing our imperfect efforts with his closing act. What this means in terms of history is that we should refrain from both excessive pessimism and excessive optimism when it comes to our actions in the public realm. This leads us to have an approach to society where we are committed to transformation without putting pressure on ourselves to usher in the ultimate triumph.[243]

God himself, through Christ Jesus, will usher in the final victory. Until that day, believers work towards human flourishing and the common good, praying with the Psalmist:

> Let your work be shown to your servants,
> and your glorious power to their children.
> Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
> and establish the work of our hands upon us;
> yes, establish the work of our hands![244]

242. Genesis 2:10a.

243. Vincent E. Bacote, *The Political Disciple: A Theology of Public Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 82, Kindle.

244. Psalm 90:16–17.

CHAPTER THREE:

LITERATURE REVIEW

> In the context of contemporary Christianity in North America, the paradigm 'faithful presence within' represents an alternative to the 'defensive against,' 'relevance to,' and 'purity from' paradigms; and the more closely one looks, the more one realizes just how quietly radical this alternative actually is.
>
> ― James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World*

Introduction

In chapter one, I explained how the church's mission, the nature of discipleship, and the Christian witness reveal a need for pastors and churches to do political discipleship. I introduced my hypothesis that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good gave Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics. In chapter two, I set forth a biblical and theological overview of human flourishing and the common good from Genesis to Revelation. Now, in chapter three, I examine how to work towards human flourishing and the common good using James Davidson Hunter's fourfold paradigm: defensive against, purity from, relevance to, and faithful presence, which I have identified as fight, flight, fusion, and flourish.[1] Hunter develops H. Richard Niebuhr's paradigm from his 1951 book, *Christ and Culture*.[2] Recognizing Niebuhr's foundational contribution, I will focus on Hunter's categories and contrast him with similar authors due to his recent publication, current influence, and timely applications.

1. James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 272, Kindle.

2. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 213-214, Kindle. See also Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 194.

Changing the World

How should Christians try to change the world? That is the question sociologist Dr. James Davidson Hunter ponders in his famous book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. He argues that it is nearly impossible for ordinary Christians to produce cultural change. He writes, "I have argued that cultural change at its most profound level occurs through dense networks of elites operating in common purpose within institutions at the high-prestige centers of cultural production."[3] People in power at places of power orchestrate change. No matter how politically active they are, the average American evangelical will likely not change the world. However, this lack of power has not dissuaded evangelical Christians from using one of several paradigms in their attempt to do so.

Fight: Defensive Against

James Davidson Hunter

Hunter's first category proposes that many American Christians have engaged in politics and culture to protect their own beliefs and identities. This politically combative posture uses the language of "fight," "war," and "win." As believers, the goal is to change the culture through laws, the courts, and elected officials who can legislate Christian values. Hunter writes:

> Theological and political conservatism are often linked in a model of cultural engagement that seeks to create a defensive enclave that is set against the world. This "defensive against" paradigm has long been embraced by Protestant Fundamentalists and mainstream Evangelicals, though it has also become a strategy in recent decades for many conservative Catholics. For Christians operating within this paradigm, their objective has always been, first and foremost, to retain the distinctiveness of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy within the larger world.[4]

3. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 274, Kindle.

4. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 214, Kindle.

The desire to protect orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice) is good. However, attempting to impose those theological values on others, who often do not subscribe to them, has not worked well. Hunter explains the posture and strategy of the culture-war method:

> Its implicit strategy for accomplishing this has been twofold: first to evangelize unbelievers, calling for the nation to repent and come back to the faith; second to launch a direct and frontal attack against the enemies of the Christian faith and worldview. One hand has been open and offering the good news of the gospel (even if only as "life insurance"), while the other hand has been tightened into a fist ready to fight—which is, of course, precisely what they have done, one issue after the other right through the century: temperance, creation and evolution, communism, prayer and Bible reading in the public schools, pornography, abortion, feminism and the traditional family, vulgarity in the arts and entertainment, and homosexuality and gay rights.[5]

Some assume that genuine faith in Christ cannot help but produce a pro-life anti-abortion agenda. Around the yearly *National Day of Prayer*, church leaders and members claim and pray 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." They forget God gave this promise to his special covenant people Israel, not America or any political party today.[6] Hunter summarizes this method, ". . . the main problem in the world is secularization; if only God could be re-enshrined in the social order, they assume, the culture would be restored."[7] They try to use the state's power to enshrine Christian values in the country, which they think will lead to flourishing and the Christian good of all.

In his paper, *The Church In Our Time: Nurturing Congregations of Faithful Presence,* Gregory Thompson labels this view "domination."[8] He writes, "The domination paradigm

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5. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 214-215, Kindle.

6. Russell Moore, "2 Chronicles 7:14 Isn't About American Politics," January 14, 2016, https://www.russellmoore.com/2016/01/14/2-chronicles-714-isnt-about-american-politics/.

7. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 213-215, Kindle.

8. Gregory Thompson, "The Church in Our Time: Nurturing Congregations of Faithful Presence," (Charlottesville, VA: New City Commons, October 2011), 11, https://www.flourishcollective.org/academy/wp-

suggests that the fundamental calling of the church is to triumph over her cultural enemies. In this view, the basic task of the church is to extend its own values into the world while the basic threat to the church is those whose values differ from its own."[9] Author Skye Jethani allegorizes this posture into a character who sees cultural sin like a virus, "You, Christian, are called to be an antibody within your culture by protecting what is good and combating what is evil."[10] This approach is often politically alienating to those on the left. Many well-intentioned Christians seem to take this approach without identifying it this way.

Wayne Grudem

Dr. Wayne Grudem, perhaps most famous for his systematic theology textbook, also wrote a systematic political theology: *Politics - According to the Bible*. In it, he argues for a position he calls "Significant Christian Influence on Government," which he describes:

> The "significant influence" view says that Christians should seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in the Bible (when rightly understood). But while Christians exercise this influence, they must simultaneously insist on protecting freedom of religion for all citizens. In addition, "significant influence" does not mean angry, belligerent, intolerant, judgmental, red-faced, and hate-filled influence, but rather winsome, kind, thoughtful, loving, persuasive influence that is suitable to each circumstance and that always protects the other person's right to disagree, but that is also uncompromising about the truthfulness and moral goodness of the teachings of God's Word.[11]

Grudem's desire for universal religious liberty, along with his respectful emphasis on civility, do not fit the perhaps oversimplified "defensive against" category. Grudem roots his position in

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content/uploads/The-Church-In-Our-Time-A-New-City-Commons-White-Paper_4.pdf. Thank you *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence'* for introducing me to this paper.

9. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 11.

10. Skye Jethani, *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* (self-published), chap. "Act 2," Kindle.

11. Wayne Grudem, *Politics – According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 55, Kindle.

scripture. Daniel influenced Nebuchadnezzar from an elite position of influence.[12] Recalling the exhortation of Jeremiah 29:7 to seek the shalom of the city, Grudem writes, "The true 'welfare' of such a city will be advanced through governmental laws and policies that are consistent with God's teaching in the Bible, not by those that are contrary to the Bible's teachings."[13] Likewise, he adds, "Believers have a responsibility to bear witness to the moral standards of the Bible by which God will hold all people accountable, including those people in public office."[14] Grudem sets forth John the Baptist as a prophetic example of speaking truth to power in the New Testament, even at one's own expense.

While I agree with much of Grudem's emphasis on scripture leading to true human flourishing, the outworking of this posture in public life begins to fit the "defensive against" paradigm. Preceding the 2020 Presidential election, he wrote an open letter to one of his friends to explain why he was publicly advocating for Christians to re-elect President Trump.[15] His thoughtful and articulate argument made the case that while President Trump's character and behavior do matter, they do not matter as much as his policy decisions, which best represent Christian values. The Christian policies justified the un-Christian means. However, the closer one examines Grudem's Christian values, the more closely they demonstrate partisan politics, affirming the Republican platform in almost every respect. Much of Grudem's essay is grounded in his belief that the conservative position is the clear biblical position.

For example, in Grudem's *Politics*, his chapter on immigration shows a very narrow political interpretation of scripture. He spends approximately three pages justifying his

12. Grudem, *Politics*, 59, Kindle.

13. Grudem, *Politics*, 59, Kindle.

14. Grudem, *Politics*, 59-60, Kindle.

15. Wayne Grudem, "Letter to an Anti-Trump Christian Friend," Townhall, August 8, 2020, https://townhall.com/columnists/waynegrudem/2020/08/08/letter-to-an-antitrump-christian-friend-n2573909.

immigration position as biblical.[16] Then he spends roughly eleven pages making the case for the typical conservative response.[17] Dr. Tremper Longman III demonstrates a much fuller approach to applying the Bible to politics in *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions*. He too, argues for a country's right to protect its borders, but his interpretative hermeneutic is much less partisan.[18] In theory, Grudem's approach is about exerting significant Christian influence on government. In reality, he seems more interested in exerting a partisan influence on government to preserve and protect his Republican brand of Christianity.

Contrary to Grudem, Timothy Keller argues that when Christians stay true to scripture, they do not fit any political party.[19] The Bible seems to warn believers not to identify God with their political agenda, even when God gave them their agenda. When Joshua leads the Israelites into the Promised Land, which God told him to do, he encounters a messenger from God and asks, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" The angel responds, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." To which Joshua responds with complete subservience: "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, 'What does my lord say to his servant?'"[20] Anytime someone declares, "This is the Christian position," it is worth remembering the best position is humble worship, seeking God's will.

16. Grudem, *Politics*, 470-472, Kindle.

17. Grudem, *Politics*, 472-483, Kindle.

18. Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot*: *Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 178-212, Kindle.

19. See Timothy Keller, "How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don't," *New York Times*, September 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/29/opinion/sunday/christians-politics-belief.html. Thank you Eugene Cho for pointing this article out in *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk* (p. 108-109, Kindle).

20. See Joshua 5:13–15. Compare with the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9–14.

Robert Benne & Jonathan Leeman

Theologian and ethicist Robert Benne wrote the book *Good and Bad Ways to Think About Politics and Religion*. Author and *9Marks* editorial director Jonathan Leeman summarizes Benne's thoughts, and in so doing, offers a better approach than Grudem's partisanship. Leeman explains there are "straight-line issues" where "there is a straight line from core biblical principles to political policy applications."[21] For some issues, it may be evident how the Bible applies. However, others are "jagged line issues," which are less clear.[22] The jump between Bible and policy is much more "complex and jagged," with no direct prescription.[23] In these cases, the Bible seems to leave space for wisdom and discernment. Leeman concludes, "churches and pastors should bind consciences on straight-line issues, while leaving jagged-line issues in the domain of Christian freedom."[24] Leeman believes "issues pertaining to life, family, and religious freedom" are straight-line issues while health care policy is not.[25] While Leeman's straight-line guidance seems to favor the right, the principle is helpful. Pastors and churches should speak more clearly on issues that scripture addresses more clearly, and hold back on less clear matters.

While pastors may critique policy and call for solutions, Leeman says pastors should refuse to back specific policies. He adds, "Just because a pastor knows that something is biblically right or wrong on a straight-line issue doesn't mean he should propose policy solutions. That would be outside his expertise and authority and subject to the wisdom of those with more competence in those areas, whether Christian or not." Pastors should speak the truth

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21. Jonathan Leeman, *How The Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 89, Kindle.

22. Leeman, *How The Nations* Rage, 89, Kindle.

23. Leeman, *How The Nations* Rage, 89, Kindle.

24. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 90, Kindle.

25. Leeman, *How The Nations Rage*, 89, 92, Kindle.

of scripture, "no more and no less."[26] While a pastor might go so far as to critique a politician's lack of moral character or policies, a pastor should be wary of using their prophetic voice to call the congregation to vote the elected official out of office. While pastors and churches may at times take a specific stance, those will be atypical. Summarizing his position, Benne writes:

> In conclusion, there is certainly room for the direct influence of the church if it is handled wisely. There are indeed times when the church must speak out with an impassioned "no," times when it must resist evil, and times when it must argue the case for policies that closely track or clearly oppose its deepest convictions. But those times are not nearly as frequent as our American churches aver. It would be far better to speak less often on fewer issues but with more prophetic power.[27]

While speaking less often may lead to more prophetic power, it is not necessarily true. Prophetic power comes from the Spirit and rightly applying God's word to a contextual issue.

Benne clarifies that this position does not limit individual parishioners but the "church as an institution."[28] The church should invest in shaping and discipling people who engage in the public square. However, the church's mission limits its political engagement. Benne says, ". . . the church has a specific calling or mission in the world. It is entrusted with the Word of God, and its primary responsibility is to proclaim that Word – as both Law and Gospel – to the world."[29] Thus, the church's mission focuses its teachings on God's Word, critiques public policy, and may, on rare occasion, make specific policy recommendations.

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26. Greg Gilbert, "How to Hold Your Tongue About Politics And Thereby Not Split Your Church Over Things the Bible Doesn't Talk About: An Addendum," 9Marks, September 29, 2020, https://www.9marks.org/article/how-to-hold-your-tongue-about-politics-and-thereby-not-split-your-church-over-things-the-bible-doesnt-talk-about-an-addendum/.

27. Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), chap. 5, Kindle.

28. Benne, *Good and Bad Ways*, endnotes, Kindle.

29. Benne, *Good and Bad Ways*, chap. 4, Kindle. Thank you to the following article for pointing to this quote. Caleb Morell, "Good and Bad Ways To Think About Religion and Politics," 9Marks, January 24, 2017, https://www.9marks.org/article/good-and-bad-ways-to-think-about-religion-and-politics/.

Grudem and Leeman might hold similar conservative positions. However, using Benne's framework, Leeman seems to offer a broader space for wisdom in determining public policy and a narrower understanding of what could pass as "Christian policy." Using Leeman's principles, I doubt most pastors would be as quick as Grudem to assert America's need for a border wall. Grudem is confident moving from doctrine to partisan policy, which likely leads to him publicly endorsing a Presidential candidate with questionable morals. Grudem's approach fits the "defensive against" posture as he seeks to use political power to create human flourishing. Yet in the end, he simply mirrors the Republican party platform.

Abraham Kuyper

The defensive against position, which Keller identifies as "The Transformationist Model," did not originate with Grudem.[30] Rather, Keller argues that some have used Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper's theology to justify leveraging politics for Christ. Although I believe this to be a misapplication of Kuyper's theology, it is easy to see how some could use Kuyper's understanding of the Lordship of Jesus over all things to justify an aggressive political strategy. Author and theology professor Michael R. Wagenman explains the core of Kuyper's theology:

> And because Jesus is Lord of all things, Christians must follow him into all areas of human life to display that lordship. In fact, Kuyper's most famous saying is about exactly this. He said that "no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!' " For Kuyper, to confess the lordship of Christ is not only to confess his lordship over the human person and the church but also over the communication technologies, political apparatus, educational institutions, and social programs for the poor.[31]

30. Keller, *Center Church*, 195-201.

31. Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), chap. 1, Kindle.

Christians are to submit every aspect of their life to Jesus, whether home, school, career, or politics, and serve him in those areas.

Keller sees Kuyper's influence in conservative engagement: "The language of the Religious Right includes calls for believers to penetrate cultural institutions, work out of a Christian worldview, and transform the culture in the name of Christ. . . . The Christian Right, of course, believes that a consistent biblical worldview leads to a conservative political philosophy."[32] Conversely, Kuyper's posture has helped other more liberal groups. Keller writes, "The neo-Calvinists, however, are center-left in their politics, seeing a progressive tax structure, strong labor unions, and more centralized economies as appropriate political expressions of the biblical principles of justice."[33] However, neo-Calvinists seem to have an easier time finding common ground with non-Christians due to relying less on Christian dogma, but rather living in a Christian way and trusting "non-Christians can intuitively discern much of how God wants humans to live in culture."[34] It seems like Kuyper's view has led some to engage in politics aggressively while others do so for the common good.

Wagenman explains Kuyper's view is not meant to fall into Hunter's defensive against or purity from approaches but is meant to further the flourishing of the world:

> The church is not a defensive bunker that we take shelter in from the world; rather, it is the launching pad from which God's people are sent into the world to bear witness to Christ and to be his salt and light in a dark and decaying world. The church is that community in the world where people are born again, shaped into loyal kingdom citizens, and discipled to be agents of reconciliation.[35]

32. Keller, *Center Church*, 196-197.

33. Keller, *Center Church*, 197.

34. Keller, *Center Church*, 198.

35. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 2, Kindle.

God seasons Christians to be salt and light in the places God has placed them, working to bring his kingdom into their contexts. While policies are important, the posture in which they are furthered also matters. Kuyper seemed to struggle to be salt and light. Those around him described him as having a "combative personality" and using "combative methods to achieve his goals in the short term."[36] While many party voters liked him, many colleagues did not, even the Dutch Queen herself.[37] His uncivil political behavior tarnished his Christian witness through his hypocritical attitude.[38] Wagenman writes, "His critics charged him with a domineering attitude which allowed for little to no contradiction to his ideas or policies. As a consequence, Kuyper and his Christian perspective were marginalized, maligned, and mocked after his electoral defeat in 1905."[39] It is difficult to separate ideas from the actions of their originators.

Christian civility is a vital part of the common good. Wagenman writes, "Whatever forms of power Christians are given must be utilized in a spirit of humble and discerning service aimed at the common good."[40] Despite his behavior, Kuyper thoroughly shaped Dutch society from a Christian position. Reviewing Kuyper's legacy, Wagenman concludes, "Yes, the Netherlands today is one of Europe's most secular countries. But Kuyper's political leadership held this cultural shift at bay for decades despite intense political and social challenges."[41] If the goal of defensive against is to defeat secularism, Kuyper's career was a short-term success. However, if the goal is human and community flourishing, such as caring for the poor or giving voice to the

36. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.
37. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.
38. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.
39. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.
40. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.
41. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.

marginalized, perhaps elements of Kuyper's legacy endures. One wonders what he could have achieved if he had not only advocated for the common good but done so in a faithful manner.

Timothy Keller

Keller thoroughly critiques "the transformationalist model," along with the legacy of Abraham Kuyper. He notes that many of its adherents have an "underappreciation for the church," writing, "Much of the excitement and creative energy ends up focusing on cosmic or social redemption rather than on bringing about personal conversion through evangelism and discipleship."[42] Kuyper himself stopped attending church for a period, prioritizing his work over Christian worship and community.[43] If believers abandon the church for the sake of the world, they have no means to truly change the world. Keller also notes that this position discovers quite a bit of policy direction from the Bible. However, he argues, "While there are important biblical values and principles in business or public service – particularly a Christian vision of human flourishing – there are no detailed biblical plans for running a company or government."[44]

Leeman and Benne would agree that the gap between just theology and just policy is primarily bridged with wisdom. Policy and politics typically "flow downstream" from culture, not the other way around. Keller writes, "In other words, while some Christians were hoping that legislation would change people's attitudes, it was pop culture, the academic institutions, the arts, and the media that were shaping the popular mind."[45] Finally, Keller also quotes Miroslav Volf's view that Christians do not need political power to change the world. Volf writes, "To state my goal pointedly: I want to make Christian communities more comfortable with being just

42. Keller, *Center Church*, 199.

43. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 8, Kindle.

44. Keller, *Center Church*, 200.

45. Keller, *Center Church*, 200.

one of many players, so that from whatever place they find themselves—on the margins, at the center, or anywhere in between—they can promote human flourishing and the common good."[46] Keller, Volf, and Hunter critique the defensive against paradigm in similar ways.

Conclusions

Hunter's development of the "defensive against" concept, or which I simply label "fight," is an approach to faith and politics that seeks to preserve cultural Christianity through politically combative means. Many Christians, trying to live out their faith in the public square, are doing so out of a self-protective posture rooted in fear of what "liberals" or "homosexuals" or another group might do. Fear cultivates self-interest instead of the common good.[47] Skye Jethani writes, "Where the fires of fear are stoked, the warm glow of Christian love will not long endure."[48] Fear makes it difficult to obey Jesus' command in Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Fear cannot produce love or flourishing.

Fear, instead, leads to anger and a desire for "domination," which is what Thompson appropriately labels his defensive against approach. He writes, "Inherent in this aggression—which most frequently takes a political form—is a sort of aspiration to triumph, a perspective in which neighbors with whom one differs are viewed not as people to be loved, but as people to be defeated."[49] We cannot seek our enemies' flourishing at the same time we are trying to defeat them. Fear typically leads to anger and resentment over perceived persecution, which may actually be a loss of privilege and restoration of equality to a marginalized group. James warns,

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46. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 79. Kindle. See also Keller, *Center Church*, 201.

47. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

48. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

49. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 11. Thompson points to Matthew 5.

"the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."[50] Likewise, Paul warns that prolonged anger opens the heart to Satan's influence.[51] This approach seems corruptible to partisan politics or incivility, which we see in Grudem and Kuyper's approaches.

At first glance, Grudem's "Significant Christian Influence" paradigm seems well thought out and a positive way to engage with culture, but it quickly converts into partisan politics. While I agree that Christian values and virtues are good for all, using politics and policies to enforce those values is risky and prone to abuse of power. It is also difficult to discern whether Grudem's approach prioritizes the good of all people or simply the good of Christians. Perhaps he sees a "trickle-down" effect that what is good for believers is good for all. He is, however, incredibly polite and respectful in his engagement. On the other end, Kuyper's framework, the Lordship of Christ over all things, can lead to a combative approach to political engagement, but it need not. Many have used it to help seek the common good. While I agree with much of Kuyper's philosophy, his behavior and lack of church prioritization tarnished his approach and diminished his witness. It is a common good to engage in politics in a civil manner.

Flight: Purity From

James Davidson Hunter

In his second category, Hunter proposes that many American Christians have separated themselves from politics and culture to preserve their beliefs and identities, often in an isolating or disengaged manner. I identify this not as "fight," but "flight," a removal of one's group to protect oneself. Jethani writes, "Flight seeks control by fleeing the threat. Fight seeks control by

50. See James 1:19–20.

51. Ephesians 4:26–27.

overpowering the threat. They are two sides of the same coin."[52] Flight is not so much an approach to culture as it is a departure from culture to safeguard one's group and one's good. Hunter identifies this as the "purity from" response:

> Those who operate within the "purity from" paradigm of cultural engagement are similar to those who operate within the "defensive against" paradigm in their desire to preserve the historical truths of Christian faith. Yet unlike the latter, they take the view that there is very little that can be done for the world because, in its fallen state, the world is irredeemable this side of Christ's return. The church itself has been compromised by its complicity with the world's sinfulness. The central task of the true church, then, is to extricate itself from the contaminating forces of the world and by so doing, return to its authentic witness.[53]

The goal is admirable. However, in this view, the world lacks the inherent goodness God gave it in Genesis. Instead of "Edenizing' the world—that is to say, establishing the good order of the Garden everywhere," believers try to build their own private oasis.[54] Individuals, families, churches, and groups of people can take this approach. Thompson identifies "flight" or "purity from" as "fortification."[55] He explains how the local church does not work to redeem the world but abandons it and sets up safely elsewhere:

> The fortification paradigm suggests that the fundamental calling of the church is to guard the integrity of its divinely wrought life against the assaults of the world. In this view, the basic task of the church is vigilant preservation and the basic threat to the church is the destructive character of the larger culture. This paradigm may be expressed in any number of ways and with varying degrees of intensity, but in virtually every case the net result is the same: the church actively cultivates a separate existence, removed from the corrupting travails of the world.[56]

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52. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

53. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 218, Kindle.

54. Robert Barron, *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 197. Kindle.

55. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 9.

56. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 9.

The church abandons the culture to "save the culture."[57] Jethani cites the "many Christian colleges and publishers, Christian movies and music, Christian amusement parks and conferences" and even "youth group" as how some Christians have responded to cultural change.[58] Believers have tried to create safe places from which to rescue others but return quickly. However, this paradigm prioritizes Christian good at the cost of the common good. At its worst, it works towards Christian flourishing and leaves the culture to perish. As in the previous section, none of the authors I review in this chapter perfectly incapsulate "purity from," but something about their approach expresses a posture of separation.

Gregory Boyd

I appreciate many things about Dr. Gregory A. Boyd's treatise on the church and politics, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church*. He explains the corrupting nature of political power and calls Christians to wield a different kind of power. Boyd explains, "While all the versions of the kingdom of the world acquire and exercise power over others, the kingdom of God, incarnated and modeled in the person of Jesus Christ, advances only by exercising power under others. It expands by manifesting the power of self-sacrificial, Calvary-like love."[59] Throughout the book, Boyd contrasts the "power over" model of governments versus the "power under" model of the church. He writes, "Everything the church is about, I argue, hangs on preserving the radical uniqueness of this kingdom in contrast to the kingdom of the world."[60] Boyd offers a helpful vision for the church being a counter-

57. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 1," Kindle.

58. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 1," Kindle.

59. Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 14, Kindle.

60. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 14, Kindle.

cultural place, yet he risks the church becoming a separate culture altogether. He emphasizes the church's uniqueness in the world but diminishes the church's efforts to restore what was lost.

One of Boyd's foundational arguments is that Satan is the head of all earthly empires, and the type of "power over" these institutions exert is primarily his kind of power. Boyd examines Satan's temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1–13 and his claim to have authority over the nations, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will."[61] Boyd concludes, "God's cosmic archenemy now owns the authority of all versions of the kingdom of the world and gives this authority to whomever he pleases."[62] He concludes that America, or any nation, should not see itself as a Christian nation, and spends an entire chapter showing how doing so harms the church and its mission.[63]

Grudem is critical of Boyd's interpretation, which he labels the "all government is demonic" perspective.[64] Grudem questions whether believers should trust Satan's claim to power because he is "the father of lies."[65] Grudem then points to Bible passages proclaiming God's lordship over all things, such as Daniel 4:17 "the Most High rules the kingdom of men."[66] Satan, however, does have some type of authority over the world and its empires. Jesus himself calls Satan "the ruler of this world."[67] While Christ has usurped Satan's authority through the cross and has bound "the strong man,"[68] Satan still uses empires to do his will, including America. In

61. Luke 4:6b.

62. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 21, Kindle.

63. See Boyd's chapter 6, "The Myth of a Christian Nation."

64. Grudem, *Politics*, 38, Kindle.

65. Grudem, *Politics*, 37, Kindle. See John 8:44.

66. Grudem, *Politics*, 37-38, Kindle. Grudem also points to Romans 13:1-6 and 1 Peter 2:13–14.

67. John 14:30; 16:11.

68. Matthew 12:29.

Revelation, the earthly city Babylon is the metaphorical embodiment of all powers and empires that stand in opposition to Christ.[69] Thus, Grudem's critique is not precisely correct.

On the other hand, Kuyper believes in the "Lordship of Christ" over all things, which allows for a much more positive role for Christians to play in the redemption and restoration of the world and its systems, even government. Wagenman summarizes Kuyper's understanding of the church's mission, not to remain holy as Boyd might argue, but to be a witness in the world. He writes, "The church is that gathering of Christian believers for worship, preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and corporate discipleship. And the church is also that same body of Christian believers sent out into the whole of the world to bear witness to Christ in every sphere of life. . . . A living church is gathered and sent, breathing in and out."[70] Boyd affirms the witness of Christians, but less for the sake of redeeming the world and more for the sake of growing the church. Kuyper, however, believes Christians can serve in any part of society for God's glory and the common good. Likewise, Hunter thinks the Great Commission is not only geographic but social, and believers can serve Christ in civil service.[71]

Boyd's contrast between the kingdom of God, ruled by Christ, and the kingdoms of the world, led by Satan, is perhaps too simplistic, too dualistic. It lends itself to a black and white understanding of the world—that the church is pure and holy, should be kept that way, and human governments are evil. Boyd emphasizes the kingdom of God's sharp distinction:

> Nothing is more important to the cause of the kingdom of God than that we who are its subjects live out this Christlike vision of the kingdom. Which is to say, nothing is more important than that we keep the kingdom of God distinct from the kingdom of the world,

69. See Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21.

70. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper*, chap. 1, Kindle.

71. See "The Great Commission" in chapter 3. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 256-257, Kindle.

> both in our thought and in our action. We must keep the kingdom of God holy, which essentially means set apart, consecrated, or distinct.[72]

I agree that believers should love others in a counter-cultural Christ-like way, and the local church should embody that difference. However, I do not believe the level of dualistic thinking Boyd embraces is healthy or even possible. Believers live in a particular time and place, which shapes their thinking and practices. It is impossible for believers to perfectly distinguish what is God's work and what is not. Jesus himself argues against such dualism. In Matthew 13:24–30, Jesus taught his disciples not to separate the weeds and the wheat, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."[73] Calvin College professor Dr. James K. A. Smith agrees, "Boyd's framing of an absolute dichotomy lacks insight. In particular, Boyd can't seem to imagine a good earthly kingdom, indicating an inadequate theology of creation and an under-developed imagination. In the Book of Revelation, doesn't the heavenly city eventually make its way down to earth?"[74] What makes Christianity so beautiful is that the good believers do in this life matters, not simply acts of evangelism but also work done for the good of others.

Smith also critiques Boyd's lack of whole-life discipleship, "Boyd's relegation of politics to a matter of indifference means that, ultimately, Christ's call to discipleship doesn't touch the public square."[75] To be a disciple means to give every part of one's life to Christ, even politics. Smith concludes, "the Spirit works through material, embodied practices of sanctification and discipleship to form citizens of the kingdom of God. Without practices that 'control behavior,' the indwelling and transformative power of the Spirit often lies dormant. Without laws that

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72. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 53-54, Kindle.

73. Matthew 13:29b.

74. James K.A. Smith, "Replacing Rallies with Revivals," *Christianity Today*, October 5, 2006, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/octoberweb-only/140-42.0.html.

75. Smith, "Replacing Rallies . . ." *Christianity Today*.

challenge unfair systems, even Christians find it easy to overlook inequities."[76] Vested power is not inherently evil. God can use it for the common good. While I appreciate Boyd's call for caution, he falls, at least partially, into Hunter's "purity from" category. In so doing, he loses opportunities to love God and others by contributing to human flourishing through politics.

John Howard Yoder

While he would have rejected the label "separatist" or "isolationist," John Howard Yoder has, perhaps more than any other in the 20th century, contributed the most to the "purity from" paradigm.[77] Much of Gregory Boyd's teachings build upon Yoder. In Yoder's classic 1972 book, *The Politics of Jesus*, he too argues that Satan rules the world, including all its systems, "There is a very strong strand of Gospel teaching which sees secular government as the province of the sovereignty of Satan."[78] Hunter defines what Yoder uses "principalities and powers" to mean, "The concept refers to the institutional or systemic patterns of thought, behavior, and relationship that govern our lives and the spiritual realm that animates them."[79] Yoder interpreted texts like Romans 13 and the book of Revelation in light of this idea.

The church is a separate "polis" from the state, but this separation led to alienation between church and state. There is no common good. What is good for Satan's powers is opposed to what is good for believers. Christianity, then, is about forming communities free from Satan's rule.[80] But sin is not only an issue of systems and injustices but of the human heart.[81] No

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76. Smith, "Replacing Rallies . . ." *Christianity Today*.

77. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 166, Kindle.

78. John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1994), 199, Kindle.

79. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 157, Kindle.

80. See Caleb Smith's helpful video: "Anabaptist Pacifism. Good, Bad, or Ugly? || The Politics of Jesus BOOK REVIEW," YouTube, January 30, 2021, https://youtu.be/DtLrxvh4Vjs.

81. Jeremiah 17:9.

group of Christians, no matter how "good," can create a space free from Satan's influence or sin's power. Sadly, Yoder himself demonstrated sin's pervasive influence by sexually abusing women. While arguing for the purity of the church, he demonstrated impurity of the heart.

Much like Boyd, if the nation, state, municipality, and any form of vested power fall under the rule of Satan and his demons, it makes it difficult for Christians to serve as civil servants or in the military in any capacity. Pacifism, rejecting the military, is one of Yoder's strongest beliefs. Referencing Romans, Yoder writes, "Christians are told (12:19) never to exercise vengeance but to leave it to God and to wrath. Then the authorities are recognized (13:4) as executing the particular function which the Christian was to leave to God. [. . .] This makes it clear that the function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians."[82] In *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence*, Preston Sprinkle makes a case for Christians serving in the military but not in positions of violence or bloodshed. He writes:

> However, I think Christians can serve in the military as noncombatants. I believe the kingdom of God should unleash its citizens into all areas of life to be agents of peace, healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness. What better place to do this than in the military? Cooks, nurses, doctors, psychologists, chaplains—these can be strategic positions to mediate the love of Christ in a place where it's greatly needed.[83]

In response, Yoder himself might point to the systemic nature of the military and warfare. To support one aspect of the mission would be to support the military's mission as a whole, which is inherently violent and thus demonic. Yoder seems to allow very little space for Christians to restore a fallen world. There appears to be no room for human flourishing within government or

82. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 201, Kindle.

83. Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 201, Kindle.

"faithful presence within" the military. While Christians should be very wary of state-sanctioned violence, there seems to be no room for the use of wisdom or the leading of the Holy Spirit.[84]

Yoder's emphasis on the church appears at first to be a good thing. Referencing "Let the church be the church," he begins to explain the priority of the church in the world.[85] He continues, "What needs to be seen is rather that the primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community."[86] While this sounds good, the church becomes a mission unto itself and nearly loses its mission to preach the gospel to the lost altogether. Yoder deemphasizes the call for repentance and emphasizes the creation of such a unique church body that non-believers are attracted to it. He writes, "Here, within this community, people are rendered humble and changed in the way they behave not simply by a proclamation directed to their sense of guilt but also by genuine social relationships with other persons who ask them about their obedience. . ."[87] This approach echoes some believers' practice of not personally sharing the gospel but hoping that others will see their way of life and ask them what makes them different, which is similar to the attractional model of church growth.

Timothy Keller

Keller critiques what he labels "The Counterculturalist Model," which he identifies with John Howard Yoder.[88] Keller explains, "The church is to be a counterculture, an alternative human society that is a sign of the kingdom to the world. It should not try to turn the world into Christ's kingdom. Rather, the best thing the church can do for the world is to exhibit Christ's

84. John 3:8; Acts 20:22–23; 21:4.

85. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 152, Kindle.

86. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 154, Kindle.

87. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 154, Kindle.

88. Keller, *Center Church*, 206.

kingdom to it, largely through the justice and peace of its community."[89] While the church should be a counter-cultural community that operates differently than the world, part of the church's mission is to love its neighbor and seek the city's welfare.[90] Biblical justice is good for the church community and the broader culture at every level of society.

Keller also reviews all the good Christianity has done, such as to "abolish slavery" and "the Christianization of Europe."[91] He also points to the loss of Christian vocation in business and government, as this model sometimes identifies those as evil.[92] Likewise, he points out how creating a separate culture is impossible, as believers cannot escape the time and place where God has placed them.[93] Finally, he critiques how it "tends to downplay the doctrines of justification and substitutionary atonement" as it highlights "Christ defeat[ing] the powers on the cross," Satan and his systems.[94] This model under-communicates repentance and faith in Jesus.[95]

Conclusions

The "purity from" paradigm Hunter developed, or "flight," is an approach to faith and politics that seeks to preserve cultural Christianity through isolationism. As both Boyd and Yoder demonstrate, it starts with good intentions to form a distinct counter-cultural community free of Satan's influence. But it underestimates the power of the human heart to corrupt and over-estimates the church's ability to free itself of cultural contamination. A kingdom oasis is simply not possible, nor is it biblical, as the kingdom of God touches all things—the church, and

89. Keller, *Center Church*, 205.

90. Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 22:39–40.

91. Keller, *Center Church*, 207.

92. Keller, *Center Church*, 207.

93. Keller, *Center Church*, 208.

94. Keller, *Center Church*, 208.

95. Keller, *Center Church*, 208-209.

the world. While the gospel provides a new way to live in the world, believers still need to go into every sphere of life to preach it and work towards the flourishing of others. Thus, there is a great-commission deficiency in the "purity from" approach common to both Grudem and Yoder. It is impossible to "flee" the world and still love it, serve it and share the gospel.

There are several things the "purity from" camp has added to the common good conversation. Their wariness of violence and rebuke of the evangelical church's affirmation of warfare is a badly needed correction. They also argue that "the ends do not justify the means," a timeless reminder the evangelical church needs to hear again. The church should not try to achieve God's good ends through man's bad means.[96] It is not that the church should try and achieve what it wants through pacifism, but that Christ changes the good which believers want. Christianity's goal is not simply overcoming through non-violence but seeking a different end altogether, the Kingdom of God.[97]

The "purity from" paradigm is rooted in fear of Satan's powers and the world's influence, causing both left and right to flee culture. But scripture says, "perfect love casts out fear."[98] Paul also says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition" and "Do not be anxious about anything."[99] "Purity from" contains a level of contempt, not love, for the world. Thompson writes, "God's way with the world is not to move away from it in disgusted hostility, but to move toward it in redemptive love."[100] John 3:17 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but

96. See Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed., 240, Kindle.

97. See *The Politics of Jesus* chapter 12, "The War of the Lamb."

98. 1 John 4:18.

99. Philippians 2:3; 4:6.

100. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 10.

in order that the world might be saved through him." Proximity, not withdrawal, helps believers share the gospel and pursue the common good in their communities.

Fusion: Relevance To

James Davidson Hunter

The "fusion" approach to engaging in faith and politics is when Christians fully embrace politics and culture at the cost of orthodox beliefs and a distinctive church or Christian identity. This is typically identified with the liberal church's mode of operation. Hunter labels his version of this category "relevance to." He writes, "Unlike those who prioritize distinctiveness though self-conscious continuity with Christian orthodoxy of the past, those in the 'relevance to' paradigm make a priority of being connected to the pressing issues of the day."[101] Engagement in the present matters more than teaching the creeds and confessions of the past.[102] According to Hunter, those within this camp are most interested in critiquing and criticizing the institutional church and the shortcomings of Christians.[103] Thompson identifies this as "accommodation:"

> Contrary to fortification, the accommodation paradigm suggests that the fundamental calling of the church is collaboration with the world in the service of the larger good. From this perspective the basic task of the church is active partnership with its neighbors in the interest of social renewal, and the basic threat to the church is its own separatist tendencies.[104]

Well-intentioned followers of this approach might take passages like 1 Corinthians 9:22b, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some," and apply it beyond what Paul intended. Paul contextualizes his delivery of the gospel message without changing the

101. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 215, Kindle.

102. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 216, Kindle.

103. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 216, Kindle.

104. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 10.

gospel itself.[105] Fusion is flexible with everything, even Christian beliefs. Like previous sections, those within this camp would likely take issue with being identified within it.

Jim Wallis

Hunter identifies Jim Wallis, the founder of Sojourners, as particularly significant among "The Christian Left,"[106] whom he charges with falling prey to "relevance to." Wallis, a self-identified evangelical, grounds much of his book, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided*, in the Bible and its call for justice. Hunter writes, "Among Christian progressives, it is the future vision of the eschaton itself—the realization of the kingdom of heaven, where justice, peace, equality, and community exist in their ultimate state of perfection—that is the abiding ideal. It is the vision of the eschaton that Christian progressives see themselves working hard to realize."[107] These believers recognize the Bible's mandate for justice and pursue it. Wallis sees the common good and the kingdom of God together:

> It's time to hear and heed a call to a different way of life, to reclaim a very old idea called the common good. Jesus issued that call and announced the kingdom of God—a new order of living in sharp contrast to all the political and religious kingdoms of the world. That better way of life was meant to benefit not only his followers but everybody else too. And that is the point of it.[108]

I affirm much of Wallis's understanding of the kingdom's world-transforming nature from his studies in Matthew and Luke.[109] However, Hunter charges that liberal theologians fall into the trap of emphasizing justice at the cost of doctrine. Indeed, Wallis is frustrated by what he would

105. Acts 17:16–34; 21:17–26; 22:1–21.

106. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 132, 137, Kindle.

107. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 134. Kindle.

108. Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 3, Kindle.

109. See Wallis's chapter 3, "Who Jesus Is and Why It Matters."

consider the conservative evangelical church's overemphasis on personal salvation, which comes at the expense of restorative work within the church and the local community.[110] Wallis writes:

> Private-atonement theology and its disciples are in serious jeopardy of missing the vision of justice at the heart of the kingdom of God. Their gospel is simply too small, too narrow, too bifurcated, and ultimately too private. And, in the end, it is (as we evangelicals are prone to say) not biblical.
>
> Here is what it comes down to. A gospel message that doesn't try to change the world and that concentrates only on individuals works only for those who don't need the world to be changed. Therefore, it ends up being too white, too privileged, too male, and too American.[111]

As explained in chapter one, the gospel has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The gospel rights humankind's relationship with God, and with all of creation, including other people. Wallis offers a corrective to evangelicals who do not care about social concerns beyond typical conservative issues—abortion and gay marriage.[112] However, Wallis misses an opportunity to help evangelicals understand the biblical connection between salvation and caring for the poor. Dr. Aaron Menikoff, a pastor in Atlanta, reviewed Wallis's work:

> But by diminishing the personal nature of the gospel, Wallis has actually shot a bullet through the foot of social change. Here's why: robust commitment to penal substitutionary atonement drives Christians to love their neighbors and do good to all. A thorough understanding of what God has done for us in Christ should lead to a life overflowing with good works —both private and public. And when it doesn't, it is not because the gospel is intellectually misunderstood, but because it is willfully disobeyed.[113]

While Wallis grasps the systemic nature of the gospel, he could have further emphasized the personal nature as well, which should aid positive corporate change. There seem to be many evangelicals who feel personally transformed without ever addressing significant social issues.

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110. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 28-29, 53, Kindle.

111. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 59, Kindle.

112. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 293, Kindle.

113. Aaron Menikoff, "The (Un)Common Good," *The Gospel Coalition*, January 19, 2015, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/uncommon-good/.

Wallis does, in other places, explain the need for "personal responsibility" and "social uplift," but as a way for left and right to value each other and work together.[114]

Wallis tells his personal story of returning to the faith when he encountered the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats.[115] He writes:

> Jesus says that the way we treat those who are "the least of these" will be regarded as the way we treat him! I was stunned when I read that for the first time, and four decades later I still am. The Son of God, sitting in judgment, as the text says, is instructing his followers and separating them like sheep and goats on the basis of how they treat those at the bottom of their societies.[116]

While some Christians only see this as a call to care for fellow Christians, Wallis argues Jesus is calling churches and even nations to care for the poor.[117] Although Wallis mentions Christ's "*judgmentalism*," he says nothing of hell or its severity.[118] It is not all that clear why Jesus's separation of the sheep and the goats matters. He even goes so far as to write, "Clearly, Jesus loves us all—and we are all God's children. Matthew 25 doesn't suggest otherwise."[119] Before salvation, however, all people are categorically "children of wrath."[120] Although all people are made in God's image and worthy of dignity and respect, God only adopts as his "children" those who trust Jesus Christ.[121] Not everyone is a child of God, and when pastors warmly call all people God's children, it undermines scripture and, ultimately, the motivation for justice. If

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114. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 162, Kindle.

115. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 65, Kindle.

116. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 70, Kindle.

117. "It is also very significant that the text uses the term "nations" to describe those who are gathered for judgment before the Son of Man. The Scripture clearly has massive implications for any who believe they are followers of Jesus, but it isn't just addressed to individuals. 'Nations' are also being held accountable." Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 70. Kindle.

118. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 70, Kindle. Emphasis his.

119. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 72, Kindle. See also page 124.

120. Ephesians 2:3b (ESV).

121. John 1:12; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1.

everyone is God's child, why obey? God would never send his child to hell. But if hell is a real possibility for those who do not bear the fruit of caring for the needy, poverty alleviation matters.

Apart from the gospel itself, Wallis highlights the importance of "covenantal" marriage over and against "recreational" sex.[122] What matters most is the covenant commitment between two people, not if they are male and female.[123] He implies that Christians do not need to hold to the historic Christian understanding of marriage:

> Is marriage only between a man and a woman? Or can it include the committed same-sex relationships that most of the biblical passages mentioning homosexuality are not really about and that their authors couldn't have imagined? That is, can the concept of civil or even sacramental marriage be applied to a set of covenantal relationships that includes gay couples?[124]

He adds that churches should not divide over this issue.[125] While I agree that same-sex couples should be treated with respect and dignity, Christians should not go so far as to affirm that gay marriage is what God designed or intends. There is common ground to be found with those who identify as LGBTQ, affording them rights and protections even as Christians and churches have rights and protections. However, gay marriage falls short of the flourishing God intends.

Like Grudem with the Republican party, Wallis seems to line up with much of the Democratic party. Some of Hunter's critiques of Wallis and the liberal left are the same as those of the right. He charges them with partisanship, just on the other side.

> In its commitment to social change through politics and politically oriented social movements, in its conflation of the public with the political, in its own selective use of scripture to justify political interests, and in its confusion of theology with national interests and identity, the Christian Left (not least the Evangelical Left) imitates the Christian Right.[126]

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122. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 267, Kindle.

123. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 269, Kindle.

124. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 269, Kindle.

125. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 269, Kindle.

126. Hunter, *To Change The World*, 147, Kindle.

While the evangelical liberal left rebukes the evangelical conservative right's use of power, they too want political power.[127] Ironically, "relevance to" ends up looking quite similar to "defensive against." Hunter charges that the Christian left, just like the Christian right, has not so much used political power as has been used by it.[128] Contrary to this, Wallis shares ways he and others have successfully lobbied for the poor.[129]

Timothy Keller

Keller analyzes "The Relevance Model," which he identifies with Jim Wallis and mainline liberal churches, the Catholic church, seeker-sensitive churches, and emergent churches.[130] The label "fusion" seems appropriate. Keller writes, "This model sees Christianity as being fundamentally compatible with the surrounding culture. Those who embrace this model believe that God is at work redemptively within cultural movements that have nothing explicitly to do with Christianity."[131] Keller critiques the concepts of flourishing and the common good:

> People operating within this model put great emphasis on the 'common good' and 'human flourishing.' They emphasize the modern church's failure to care about inequality, injustice, and suffering in the world. They call the church to work for justice in society, and they declare that only when it does so will it regain the credibility to speak to society about God.[132]

Keller explains how over-emphasizing relevance, justice, and social concerns can lead to a loss of Christian distinctiveness and a lack of evangelism and discipleship.[133] Keller would affirm Wallis's concern for the poor. He writes, "Caring for the poor and the weak became, ironically, a

127. Hunter, *To Change The World*, 148-149, Kindle.

128. Hunter, *To Change The World*, 148, Kindle.

129. Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good*, 79, Kindle.

130. Keller, *Center Church*, 201-203, 223. Keller also identifies Wallis's "Counterculturalist" leanings.

131. Keller, *Center Church*, 201.

132. Keller, *Center Church*, 202.

133. Keller, *Center Church*, 204.

major reason for the cultural influence the church eventually came to wield. If the church does not identify with the marginalized, it will itself be marginalized. This is God's poetic justice."[134] However, Keller would also affirm Jesus' mission to forgive sins and redeem people.[135] While churches can and should care for the common good and human flourishing, it must not come at the cost of the gospel message and a clear evangelistic witness.

Conclusions

The "relevance to" paradigm, or "fusion," is an approach to faith and politics that desires to create a more just society but risks becoming absorbed and used by it. Wallis himself, the most prominent mouthpiece of the evangelical left, makes a strong argument for caring for the poor and seeking the common good. But he does not ground the Christian's mandate to do good in the saving grace of God or the punishment of hell for those who disobey.[136] Caring for the poor, both inside and outside the Christianity community, is a fruit of personal salvation. While speaking truthfully about the need for the church to care for the poor, Wallis does not sufficiently communicate both God's love and holiness. Thompson further addresses the "accommodation" paradigm. He writes:

> . . . it takes seriously the Bible's call to 'go into all the world' (Matt. 28). And many churches that operate out of this paradigm do so with admirable compassion and attentiveness to the culture around them. And yet in spite of these good intentions, the end result in many cases is clear: the church, in prioritizing collaboration with culture becomes indistinct from it—embracing not only its aims, but also its ideologies and methods.[137]

134. Keller, *Center Church*, 224.

135. Mark 2:1–12; Luke 4:18–19; 7:18–22.

136. Matthew 25:41, 46.

137. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 10.

While fusion addresses the issues of the day, it risks losing Christianity's unique cultural identity. Some of this paradigm is rooted in a deep desire to create shalom, but other aspects may be rooted in fear and the desire to be accepted.[138] Thompson concludes:

> . . . the accommodation paradigm fails to seriously reckon with the fact that the work of the church is not only to partner with its neighbors collaboratively, but also to bear witness to its neighbors prophetically. That is, the work of the church is not simply to participate in the world that is, but also must bear witness to the world that ought to be."[139]

Fight, flight, and fusion all fall short of human flourishing and the common good. Biblical shalom strives to represent Christ well in a particular place and among people in need.

Flourish: Faithful Presence

James Davidson Hunter

In contrast to the defensive against, purity from, and relevance to paradigms, Hunter proposes an alternative posture for engaging in culture: "Faithful presence within."[140] If the three other positions can be summarized as fight, flight, and fusion, faithful presence is about church, community, and human flourishing. Hunter argues that Christians should seek to be loyal to Christ and yet present within the culture God has placed them, worshiping God and loving their neighbors. Building upon each other, Hunter explains faithful presence in three parts:

> First, faithful presence means that we are to be fully present to each other within the community of faith and fully present to those who are not. Whether within the community of believers or among those outside the church, we imitate our creator and redeemer: we pursue each other, identify with each other, and direct our lives toward the flourishing of each other through sacrificial love.[141]

138. Proverbs 1:7a (ESV).

139. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 10.

140. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 272, Kindle.

141. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 244, Kindle.

Hunter offers love, not fear, as the foundation for faithful presence. Love unifies believers in God's purposes.[142] 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Faithful presence is only possible through operating out of faith in God, hope for what he can do, and love for God, others, and even enemies.

Hunter also highlights the importance of work itself: "Second, faithful presence requires that Christians be fully present and committed to their tasks."[143] Christians should work diligently and with integrity whatever kind of work God grants them.[144] And finally, believers are to do that good work, saturated with love, in every arena of life. He writes, "Third, faithful presence in the world means that Christians are fully present and committed in their spheres of social influence, whatever they may be: their families, neighborhoods, voluntary activities, and places of work."[145] This explanation is helpful as it offers principles that many Christians could widely use to positive effect. However, Hunter's explanation does not thoroughly examine if there are specific jobs Christians cannot take, such as involvement in the military.[146] This example shows a more significant deficiency in Hunter's paradigm, his lack of a prophetic voice.

Vermon Pierre

Hunter published *To Change the World* in 2010. In 2015, *The Gospel Coalition* published a compilation of authors reviewing and analyzing Hunter's work. In *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence,'* author and pastor Vermon Pierre critiques what he identifies as faithful presence's

142. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 244, Kindle.

143. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 246-247, Kindle.

144. Hunter references Colossians 3:22–24.

145. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247, Kindle.

146. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, 167-168, Kindle. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 202, Kindle.

"passive witness within the culture."[147] There are times when Christians need to take a public yet winsome stand against cultural idolatry and sin. Pierre points to Daniel, his three companions, and Nehemiah as examples of those who graciously spoke truth to those in power, even while in exile.[148] Nathan and Esther also spoke prophetically before kings and rulers.[149] Christians have spoken prophetically at critical moments in our country's history, which has led to reforming unjust systems and laws, such as Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement. The Black church has a historic tradition of faithful presence, even in persecution and suffering, while at the same time speaking prophetically for truth. Pierre proposes reforming Hunter's paradigm to "faithful prophetic presence," explaining his revision:

> Faithful prophetic presence will entail some seeking placement within influential institutions in order to slowly subvert those institutions, thus setting the stage for long-term change. We might call these the "court prophets." They seek to be wise compromisers within the current cultural systems and institutions. They are salt in the midst of the world, looking to subtly enhance and improve the culture in Godward directions.[150]

This approach matches Hunter's great commission conception of going into every sphere of society. Yet, it takes a more intentional and active posture in the public square. There will be times when Christians and local churches need to prayerfully, humbly, graciously, and yet persuasively use their prophetic voice. Russell Moore explains how the church is no longer a "moral majority" but rather "we should see ourselves as a *prophetic minority*."[151] Every local church has a corporate responsibility to speak prophetically to itself and within the context where

147. Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," in *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Faithful Presence Needs [. . .]," Kindle.

148. Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," *Revisiting*, Kindle. See Nehemiah 2:3–8; Daniel 2:31–45.

149. 2 Samuel 12:1–15; Esther 7:3–6.

150. Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," *Revisiting*, Kindle.

151. Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), chap. 2, Kindle. Emphasis his.

it resides. The church sends its members out to speak truth and justice in the contexts God has placed them, among their families, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.[152] However, knowing when to speak prophetically and how much to say requires wisdom, the Holy Spiri, and the church body. The Bible has much to say about justice but much less to say about specific policy. Speaking prophetically is a vital part of seeking human flourishing.

Miroslav Volf

Another major contributor to the concept of human flourishing is Dr. Miroslav Volf, most notably through his work at the *Yale Center for Faith & Culture* and in his many books.[153] In *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, Volf writes of how important this topic is. He says, "A vision of human flourishing—and resources to realize it—is the most important contribution of the Christian faith to the common good."[154] If the church's contribution to flourishing can bless the world, how should it enter the conversation?

Volf lays the foundation for the common good in the first and second commandments, loving God and others. He writes, "The challenge facing Christians is ultimately very simple: love God and neighbor rightly so that we may both avoid malfunctions of faith and relate God positively to human flourishing."[155] Loving God first leads to faithfulness to the Christian faith, doctrine, and beliefs, but also to praxis, loving others, serving them, and being present with them—faithful presence. Volf would likewise expand this concept to faithful prophetic presence, seeing the need for the church and Christians to speak in the public square.[156] Volf adds,

152. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

153. See https://faith.yale.edu.

154. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 63, Kindle.

155. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 76, Kindle.

156. Volf, *A Public Faith*, "Introduction," 7, Kindle.

"Christian faith is therefore a 'prophetic' faith that seeks to mend the world. An idle or redundant faith—a faith that does not seek to mend the world—is a seriously malfunctioning faith."[157] It seems many churches and Christians have "malfunctioned" as they have interacted with culture. With love for God and others as the foundation, Volf presents a paradigm similar to Hunter's.

Volf argues the best way to transform culture is not "accommodation," which leads to loss of Christian identity, nor is it too "coercive," which forces Christian values on a resistant culture, but neither is it "separatist" as change requires "proximity."[158] Each approach has theological and practical problems, bearing the fruit of alienation or assimilation in some way. Instead, Volf calls for a type of resilient flexibility to shape the culture from within:

> The main images are "metaphorizing" the culture, making it function in a different register, subverting it from within, using it to different ends, diverting from it without leaving, and so on. These are all ways of expressing the middle between abandoning and dominating the culture, of describing what it might mean to assert one's difference while remaining within it.[159]

This is the path of the most significant risk, not of safety and security. Yet it is the path of human flourishing and faithful testimony to Christ. Keller summarizes Volf's three ways Christians can influence culture.[160] Keller writes, "They can (1) adopt it as something acceptable, (2) take up the element but transform it from within, or (3) reject it and even work to abolish it in a society for the good of all."[161] Volf identifies his approach with that of Hunter's.[162] Much like Keller, Volf recognizes there is no "one-size fits all" approach:

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157. Volf, *A Public Faith*, "Introduction," Kindle.

158. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 84-89, Kindle. Thank you Timothy Keller for pointing to this section of Volf's book. See Keller, *Center Church*, 236, 244, Kindle.

159. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 90-91, Kindle.

160. Keller, *Center Church*, 236, Kindle.

161. Keller, *Center Church*, 236, 244, Kindle. He is summarizing pages 91-92 of *A Public Faith*.

162. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 158, Kindle. Thank you Keller for referencing this in *Center Church*, 244.

> From the three complementary ways of relating to culture, it follows that Christian identity in a culture is always a complex and flexible network of small and large refusals, divergences, subversions, and more or less radical and encompassing alternative proposals and enactments, surrounded by the acceptance of many cultural givens. There is no single way to relate to a given culture as a whole or even to its dominant thrust; there are only numerous ways of accepting, transforming, or replacing various aspects of a given culture from within.[163]

Does a phrase like "faithful prophetic presence" or a term like "flourishing" adequately encapsulate this faithful yet fluid approach to faith and politics? Volf uses the word "Engagement."[164] The whole church body, individual and corporate, gathered and scattered, engages the whole of society, from top to bottom in all its complexities and structures, with a God-centered vision of human flourishing.[165] This engagement is set and sustained through a clear focus on Christ Jesus, his presence in this world, and his mission to not condemn the world but to save it.[166] As Christians and churches navigate the day-to-day complexities and difficulties of seeking the common good for the sake of their neighbor, they also need wisdom.[167] Just as wisdom helps bridge the gap between justice and policies, so wisdom helps Christians humbly engage the world with grace and truth.

Timothy Keller

Perhaps there is no more current, influential, and widely accepted voice among evangelicals than Timothy Keller on how the church should interact with the culture. While Keller critiques cultural paradigms similar to the ones Hunter critiques, he finds value within each. Each of his models, which are developments of Niebuhr's—Transformationist,

163. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 93, Kindle.

164. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 96, Kindle.

165. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 98, Kindle. Emphasis his.

166. John 3:16–18.

167. Volf, *A Public Faith*, 101, Kindle. See all of chapter 6.

Counterculturalist, Relevance, and Two Kingdoms—seems to grasp some aspects of the biblical story remarkably well.[168] Keller urges "a nuanced and balanced approach" that allows those within one paradigm to draw upon the strengths and themes of others.[169] This center principle is the foundation for his work:

> This is a Center Church model for cultural engagement in which we seek to avoid the imbalances of triumphalism or withdrawal in the existing models and are equally loath to commit either cultural compromise or cultural withdrawal. A Center Church approach seeks to blend the cultural and biblical insights of all the models into our actual practice and ministry.[170]

He adds, "I consider my Center Church model of 'blended insights' to be essentially the same approach as James Hunter's 'faithful presence' described in *To Change the World*."[171] Keller further develops his model by introducing "four seasons in the cycle of the church's relationship to a culture."[172] These seasons are:

> *Winter* – a church that is hostile to culture, seeing little fruit; embattled and spiritually weak.
> *Spring* – a church that is embattled, possibly persecuted by the culture, but is seeing growth.
> *Summer* – an "allied" church, highly regarded by the culture with Christians in the centers of cultural production.
> *Autumn* – a church that is increasingly marginalized in a post-Christian culture, looking for new ways to reach out winsomely.[173]

There is no one paradigm for each season, but each of Keller's models contains strengths and weaknesses that can help a church navigate its particular season.[174]

There may be seasons when the church has to work especially hard to transform social ills, which may be perceived as fight but should instead take the posture of faithful prophetic

168. Keller, *Center Church*, 194, 225-226.

169. Keller, *Center Church*, 223, 236.

170. Keller, *Center Church*, 236.

171. Keller, *Center Church*, 244.

172. Keller, *Center Church*, 237.

173. Keller, *Center Church*, 243. Emphasis his. Originally published as bullet-points.

174. Keller, *Center Church*, 238.

presence. There may be seasons when the church has to intentionally remove itself from aspects of society to act as a prophetic voice in the wilderness, sharing aspects of flight but still striving to be in the world, yet not of it.[175] There may be seasons when the church has to invest itself so fully in its community that others may accuse it of fusion, yet it must remain faithful to Christ and the gospel. Thus flourishing, or faithful presence, tries to use the best of each approach, recognizing there will be "seasons" of ministry emphasizing unique approaches.

Conclusions

The authors in this section, beginning with Hunter's work and expanding to Thompson, Keller, and Volf with their developments, have all helped clarify human flourishing and the common good. Sometimes the best way to define something is by first examining what it is not, which several authors have also helped accomplish. Thompson creates a helpful summary for this four-fold way of engaging. He identifies his main position not as faithful presence but as "incarnation." He writes:

> Unlike fortification, the incarnational church seeks to follow Jesus into every sphere of creation. Unlike accommodation, the incarnational church not only moves fully into the world but also retains the integrity of its God-given character and proclamation as it does so. And unlike domination, the incarnational church sees its movement into the world not as an angry movement of conquest but as a hopeful movement of redemptive love; seeking not to triumph over its neighbors, but to work for their flourishing.[176]

Jesus offers the church a different pathway for interacting with faith, politics, and culture. This new way, the way of flourishing, for many Christians is a complete posture shift. It is more than a change of practice. It is a new way of life.

Changing to a flourishing model will be difficult for those comfortable with the fight, flight, or fusion models of engagement. Jethani writes, "Here is what you must understand,

175. John 17:14–18.

176. Thompson, "The Church in Our Time," 12.

Christian, I am not calling you to endorse your culture. I am inviting you to embrace your culture. Rather than seeing it as an undesirable circumstance, learn to choose it as the time and place where God has called you for a reason. That is how to break the grip of fear and begin to love like Jesus."[177] When believers and the church begin to believe God has called them to a particular time and place to love God and their neighbors, even those on the other side of the political aisle, flourishing becomes possible.

While national and state politics are the most attention-grabbing, Christians and churches have much more opportunity to affect human flourishing in their own cities and towns. The common good is most possible at a local and embodied level. It should come as no surprise that faithful presence is most possible where God has already placed his people. Knowing how to engage best requires wisdom, balance, and drawing upon the good in other traditions and models. The problem with any categorical paradigm is its oversimplification of complex beliefs and ideas. There is no "one-size-fits-all" paradigm. Yet, faithful presence within, or better yet, faithful prophetic presence, offers believers and churches a way to seek human flourishing, work towards the common good, and honor Jesus in faith and politics.

177. Jethani, *The Voting Booth*, chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE PROJECT

> I *loved* the space to come together with people of a variety of perspectives and talk about how we understand all of these political concepts. I loved that the discussion was honest, thoughtful, not just an echo chamber, and centered in Scripture. Despite spending 10 weeks on it, I never felt like there was enough time to do each week's topic justice - I wanted to learn and discuss and dive deeper every week.
>
> ― Participant 15C, post-series survey

Introduction

Chapter one explained why political discipleship is an essential part of the church's discipleship and mission and introduced my hypothesis. In chapter two, I presented biblical and theological foundations, and in chapter three, I contrasted Christian authors addressing the integration of faith and politics. In this chapter, I explain the design of my project and how it tested my hypothesis, its implementation, the data gathered, and draw some conclusions. Chapter five draws further conclusions, applications, and next steps.

Design

Hypothesis

In chapter one, I hypothesized that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good have given Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics. To test my hypothesis, I preached a 10-part sermon series entitled *Faith & Flourishing in Politics*. I also presented the acronym F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H. and led an accompanying Christian Education class where participants discussed the previous Sunday's sermon topic with additional teaching.

Direct Teaching & Discussion

I presented an overview of the series project in "Chapter One" of this thesis paper. Readers may also review Appendix A for sermon manuscripts, sermon slides, and Christian education slides, and Appendix D for web links to sermon videos. Direct teaching took place through a 30-to-40-minute sermon on Sunday morning and an hour-long Christian Education class. The class included time for group prayer needs at the beginning and a brief prayer of response at the end. Each Sunday or Monday, I sent a follow-up email containing "Spiritual Exercises," which included reflection activities and resource recommendations, such as sermons and articles. I chose the content and exercise to match that week's particular topic and theme. With each sermon, I posted all these resources to our church website: CornerstoneWestford.com.

Intended Audience

My intended audience was the members and attenders of Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, Massachusetts. I limited the project to anyone 13-years of age or older. In my personal experience, many teenagers are also interested in culture and politics, and I wanted to give them the opportunity to engage. I would classify Cornerstone as a small church, averaging somewhere around 55-65 attenders, including ten or so children who would not be eligible to participate.

Forms & Surveys

I created an informed consent form, a pre-series survey, and a post-series survey to assess the effectiveness of my hypothesis. I have included all three documents in Appendix B of this paper. I used *Microsoft Forms* to create online forms, which allowed project participants to input their answers directly and digitally. I also used email to notify the church and project participants. I did not use hard copies of the forms.

My informed consent form followed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's IRB template. Due to the potentially divisive nature of a thesis-project on faith and politics, I highlighted potential risks and how I would minimize those identified risks. For example, I disclosed, "Relationships and church body may experience conflict or disagreement due to addressing faith and politics." Correspondingly, I wrote, "The researcher will introduce the importance of civility for discussing faith and politics and will act as a facilitator/mediator for group discussion in order to foster mutual-respect and unity within the church body." Please refer to Appendix B for other risks and their mitigations.

In the pre-series survey, I assessed participants' planned participation in the research study in question one. In questions two through three, I assessed how often they perceived the church addressed politics and how equipped they felt to integrate their faith and politics. This helped me determine who was equipping their political discipleship. In question four, I assessed their expectations for civility while discussing religion and politics, which I needed to measure before and after the series. And in question five, I asked participants to identify which political party they were registered with to help determine if partisanship was a factor. The first of my qualitative questions further assessed party identification by asking participants to identify their politics in their own words. This question looked past the party to ideology.

In questions seven through eleven, I asked research participants mostly open-ended questions to help them explain their typical pattern of political engagement and begin to identify whether or not it is rooted in a biblical or theological framework. I intended for these questions to help participants think more deeply about applying their Christianity to their public life, even before the teaching series began. In questions twelve through seventeen, I assessed whether they thought Christians should integrate their faith and politics in a particular way, including what

they believe about faithful and unfaithful Christian participation. These questions helped me assess if their political leanings influenced their perspective of others' spirituality. In question eighteen, I assessed their beliefs about Christian behavior and civility to see if my series changed any pre-existing ideas. In question nineteen, I assessed their baseline understanding of "human flourishing" and "the common good." In question twenty, I provided participants an opportunity to add additional information.

I included the same questions and several new questions in the post-series survey. I added a question to identify if a participant had completed the pre-series survey. This allowed me to open the surveys to those who did not participate in the first survey but still offered valuable feedback. As explained in "Implementation" below, I added a system to help match pre-series surveys with post-series surveys. I also added two quantitative questions asking how much individuals participated in the sermons and class. I also created a new question to let participants identify anything they thought had changed in their thinking due to participating in the series. Finally, I included an additional question to allow project participants to explain and emphasize what they appreciated, disliked, or would change. I favored open-ended qualitative questions as I found it difficult to create numerical questions that would assess a framework of concepts like politics, theology, and civility.

Implementation

Advertising

In preparation for the launch of the series the first Sunday in October, on Thursday, September 16th, 2021, I sent a church-wide email pre-announcing my project and sermon series. I gave reasons to get interested and that I would officially announce the series that upcoming

Sunday, September 19th. I also made a minute-long video for social media.[1] On September 19th, I announced *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* and explained my D.Min research study, including the pre-series and post-series surveys. I then sent several additional emails explaining the series and sharing hyperlinks to the *Microsoft Forms* consent form and the first survey. I included *Zoom* login information as well. I included invitations to the series in the bulletin throughout the series. I also invited people to attend the class during the weekly announcements for the first several weeks. In the months leading up to the series, I personally invited church-goers to participate. Some did so; others did not.

Participation

I had 24 individuals fill out the informed consent form, and parents permitted three teenagers to participate for a total of 27 total series participants. Two participants forgot to fill out the IRB form and did so at the end in December. One participant, who only completed the post-series survey, completed the IRB form near the end as well, so there were a total of 26 early participants who had the opportunity to do both surveys.

I received 19 responses to my pre-series survey with an average completion time of 58:26. However, one participant reported that they filled out the survey while doing other things, so I suspect that may have happened with others. Of those 19, only 7 checked their intention to attend the Christian Education hour. As analyzed further below in the results section, 15 people, not including myself, participated in the Christian Education hour, but only 10 of those did so consistently. Several participated several weeks before dropping. Two teenagers overheard the

1. See "cornerstone.westford" Instagram post, September 17, 2021 https://www.instagram.com/p/CT7DrV0Jygl/.

discussion as they helped with projection and sound but did not directly participate. They left halfway through the discussion to go to their age-specific class.

In contrast, I received 17 responses to the post-series survey, which took an average time of 66:38. Two of those responses did not fill out the pre-series survey, so only 15 of the initial 26 early participants completed the research study from beginning to end, or 58%. I sent several reminder emails at series end, including an email to the congregation opening up participation to any who wanted to offer a response, which netted one additional respondent. I officially launched the sermon series on October 3rd and the Christian Education class discussion on October 10th. I finished the sermon series on December 5th and the class on December 12th. After an extension, I closed the survey the week of Christmas.

Changes & Methodology Error

Initially, I closed the pre-series survey the morning of my first sermon. However, after gaining approval from my thesis-project mentor, Dr. Jason McConnell, I extended the survey for one more week. Several church members had expressed a desire to participate. This extension netted two additional results that the first week's sermon may have marginally influenced. However, that single sermon did not result in any noticeable changes to their answers.

Midway through the series, I realized I did not create a system to match individual answers from the pre-series survey to individual answers from the post-series survey. I would be able to compare a group, but not individuals. To mitigate this error, I added a question allowing project participants to share a quote or general answer from their first survey. I had encouraged participants to save a standalone file of their responses in the initial instructions. Using these answers, I matched 10 of the 15 participants who completed both the pre and post-surveys, or 67%. Using personal knowledge of the group and conversations with participants, I matched

another answer set for a total of 11 of 15, or 73%.[2] I used the remaining participants to make general observations about the group.

I also missed an opportunity to assess if project participants could remember the acronym F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H. I could have evaluated this with a qualitative question, such as, "Please explain the acronym F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H. and write what you recall what each letter represents." I did not immediately recognize this error until my post-series survey was in progress. One of the reasons this happened was because I wanted to assess the level of internalization using the other questions. I now think it would have been best to incorporate the question.

Participant Identification & Anonymity

I have arranged the respondents' answers in Appendix C. I have identified each by an anonymous label, "Participant 1A, Participant 2A, Etc." Participants 1A-11A completed both surveys, and I have matched their responses. Participants 12B-19B are the remaining participants from the pre-series survey who I was not able to match with their post-series surveys. Participants 12C-17C are those respondents who filled out the post-series survey, but I could not match it with their pre-series survey. Two did not have one.[3] Group A completed both surveys. Group B completed the pre-series survey, and some completed the post-series survey. And most of Group C completed the pre-series survey, but I could not identify their previous response set. Throughout my analysis, I will refer to participants by their anonymous label. I have sometimes redacted parts of their answers to protect their identities.

2. While I did not ask participants how they had answered the surveys, several offered their thoughts and specific observations that stood out to them, which they later wrote in their survey results. Several also included personal facts, now redacted, and timing of completion, which helped me match the additional answer.

3. Participant 13C and Participant 15C, as noted in Appendix C.

Results

Series & Class Participation

Of the 17 who responded to the survey, they listened to an average of 9.24 of the ten total sermons. Eight listened to all ten, six listened to nine, two listened to eight, and only one listened to seven. None reported listening to less than seven of the sermons; however, I theorize those individuals did not complete the post-series survey. Fifteen individuals, not including the teacher, participated in the class. However, only 12 of those 15 participants filled out the post-series survey. Two reported attending all ten sessions, five reported nine sessions, two reported eight sessions, one reported six sessions, and two reported just three sessions. Five reported no sessions. Of the twelve who did participate in the post-series survey, they reported average participation of 7.75 classes.[4]

Level of Political Discipleship

Question 2 of the pre-series survey and question 5 of the post-series survey assessed how often a church attender perceived their pastor or church addressed politics. As shown in Table 1,

Table 1. In your experience, how often has your pastor or church addressed politics or political issues?

	Pre-Series		Post-Series	
Always (5)	0	0%	0	0%
Very Often (4)	3	16%	2	12%
Sometimes (3)	11	58%	12	71%
Rarely (2)	4	21%	3	18%
Never (1)	1	5%	0	0%
Total	19		17	**% Change**
Average Score	2.84		2.94	3.5%

pre-series, the 19 participants scored an average of 2.84 on a five-point scale, a little less than "Sometimes." Post-series, the 17 participants scored an average of 2.94, which showed a 3.5%

4. I did not track actual attendance to compare; but could review Zoom recordings if necessary.

increase. I was surprised the score did not move much after a 10-week sermon series on politics. Perhaps I should have emphasized filling out their new answers in light of the teaching series.

Level of Equipping

As shown in Table 2, question 3 of the pre-series and question 6 of the post-series survey assessed how well a church attender felt equipped to address political issues. On a scale of 1-5, 5

Table 2. How equipped do you feel to address political issues from a biblical perspective?

	Pre-Series		Post-Series	
Very High (5)	0	0%	0	0%
Above Average (4)	11	58%	12	71%
Average (3)	5	26%	5	29%
Below Average (2)	2	11%	0	0%
Very Low (1)	1	5%	0	0%
Total	19		17	**% Change**
Average Total Score	3.37		3.71	10.0%
Class Participation	12		3.75	11.3%
6 or More Classes	10		3.80	12.8%
No Class Participation	5		3.60	6.9%

being “Very High” and 1 being “Very Low, before the series, participants scored an average of 3.37, or slightly better than average. After the series, research study participants scored 3.71, or a 10% increase. Those who participated in the class discussions scored 3.75, or an 11.3% increase. However, two of those participants only reported attending 3 times. The other 10 participants attended 6 or more classes. This group scored the highest levels of feeling equipped, 3.80, a 12.8% increase from the pre-series surveys. Those who only listened to the sermons, and did not attend the discussions, only scored 3.60, or a 6.9% increase in feeling equipped. Those who consistently participated in the class at least 60% of the time or more reported feeling more equipped to address political issues from a biblical perspective. While attending the sermon

series also increased feeling equipped, it was nearly half as much as those who participated in the class. This seems to affirm my hypothesis that both teaching and discussion are important.

Comparing Table 1 with Table 2, it seems that while research study participants perceived their pastor and church only addressed politics sometimes or less, scoring 2.84 before the series and 2.94 after the series, participants reported higher levels of feeling equipped, 3.37 before the series and 3.71 after the series. While congregants perceive themselves as being equipped, the pre-series data suggests their equipping is not primarily coming from the local church or pastoral care. This indicates that pastors and churches may need more political discipleship within their congregations or to connect them with trustworthy sources. The post-series data suggests that intentional political discipleship and group discussion can raise the level of equipping, even if congregants do not perceive the church or pastor as its source.

Possibility of Civility

As shown in Table 3, question 4 in the pre-series survey and question 7 in the post-series survey measured participants' perception of the possibility of civility while discussing faith and politics in the local church setting. The goal was for participants to experience civility in the context of the sermon series and discussion time and for the score to increase. On a six-point

Table 3. Is it possible to have a mutually respectful and beneficial conversation about faith and politics without causing division within the local church?

	Pre-Series		*Post-Series*	
Definitely (5)	4	21%	4	24%
Very Probably (4)	3	16%	6	35%
Probably (3)	5	26%	2	12%
Possibly (2)	7	37%	4	24%
Probably Not (1)	0	0%	1	6%
Definitely Not (0)	0	0%	0	**0%**
Total	19		17	% Change
Average Score	3.21		3.47	8.1%

scale of 0-5, 5 being “Definitely” and 0 being “Definitely Not,” pre-series participants scored an average of 3.21, or just above “Probably.” Following the series, participants scored 3.47, or an 8.1% increase. While the number of “Definitely” answers remained level at 4, “Very Probably” doubled from 3 to 6. Both “Probably” and “Possibly” also decreased. However, “Probably Not” increased by one. Per Appendix C, that participant, Participant 6A, was strongly pro-life. Perhaps their experience of my teaching and our classroom discussion on that topic did not leave them feeling reassured.[5] While a pastor or church leader can teach and do everything in their power to foster a civil environment for discussing politics, they cannot control others' experience of that setting. Over the series, most participants reported an increased hope for civil discussion.

Political Identification

Questions 5 and 6 in the pre-series survey and questions 8 and 10 in the post-series survey helped participants identify their political party. The goal was to measure the potential

Table 4. Which political party, if any, are you currently registered with?

	Pre-Series		**Post-Series**	
Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	15	79%	12	71%
Republican Party	2	11%	2	12%
Democratic Party	1	5%	1	6%
Not Registered to Vote	1	5%	2	12%
Total	19		17	

level of partisanship within the research group and see if that might affect the results. As seen in Table 4, most of the research study participants were “Unenrolled,” which is “Independent,” between 71-79%.[6] Only 11-12% identified as “Republican,” and 5-6% identified as

5. We discussed abortion during the “Understanding & Wisdom” Christian Education hour.

6. One wrote “Independent” in the pre-series survey, which I counted with the other “Unenrolled” answers. Many MA residents register as “Unenrolled” as that allows voters to vote in either primary election. If residents register as Republican or Democrat, they can only vote in their party’s primary.

"Democratic." The matching surveys showed no change in political party over the course of the study. Overall, it seems voter registration might not be an influential factor. However, ideological identification showed more nuance and right-leaning.[7]

When asked, "In your own words, how do you identify yourself politically?" in the pre-series survey, six individuals, or around 30% of respondents, identified as conservative, and another three, 16%, identified as moderately conservative.[8] Four of the six who identified as "Conservative" simply wrote as such. Participant 8A wrote, "Conservative, family values, constitutionalist" and Participant 11A wrote, "Conservative, believe in least possible government, most widely distributed power." Seven respondents, or 37%, identified as moderate or a mixture of beliefs in their pre-series surveys.[9] Participant 5A wrote pre-series, "cynical and tired - in favor of smaller government - fiscally conservative - environmentally conscious - compassionate - 25% Republican, 50% Libertarian, 12.5% Democrat, 12.5% Green-Rainbow."[10] Only Participant 14B identified as liberal, and only partially pre-series, "Getting more liberal as I age." Participants 4A and 19B identified as not-interested in politics pre-series.

Most matching participants showed no change post-series, as seen in Appendix C. However, several participants showed perhaps some differentiation or further development in their political self-identification. Participant 6A identified as "moderate conservative" in the pre-series survey and simply "Conservative" in the post-series survey. The series may have resulted in this participant's clearer political self-identification, which throughout the post-series survey is

7. "Right leaning" means the participant seems to prefer socially and politically conservative views.

8. Conservative: Participants 7A, 8A, 10A, 12B, 18B, 11A. Moderately Conservative: 1A, 2A, 6A.

9. Participants 3A, 5A, 13B, 15B, 16B, 17B, 9A.

10. I have presented participants' answers without correcting or marking [sic], unless I did so using a corrected word in brackets. Appendix C sometimes preserves the original unedited answer. I have added some periods, or moved them slightly, to add clarity or completion of thoughts. I have also cut two spaces to one.

consistently pro-life. Participant 7A, likewise, identified as "Conservative" pre-series but post-series, they wrote, "I believe in following the Bible and the Constitution. I am not affiliated but tend to vote Republican because I believe they are closer to following the Bible and the Constitution than Democrats." On the other side, Participant 4A identified as not very interested in politics pre-series, but post-series identified more independent and even acknowledged being a registered Democrat. [11] While I did not intend to help people self-differentiate their political ideology, this series seems to have helped several participants do that.

Overall, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis paper, my evangelical congregation seems to lean to the right, which matches larger evangelical trends. About half identify as conservative or moderately conservative. The rest identify as moderate, typically a mixture of beliefs on both the right and left, with only one or two identifying as primarily liberal.

Political Decision-Making

In question 7 of the pre-series and question 11 of the post-series, I asked, "How do you determine which candidates and policies to vote for/against?" I wanted to explore what motivated engagement and whether it was theological or otherwise. About half before and after the series mentioned Jesus, God, the Bible, or other historically evangelical issues such as abortion.[12] Participant 12B wrote pre-series, "There is no party of Christ, so I try to identify key issues and the stances on balance." Participant 1A answered pre-series, "Weigh how they align with my biblical world view." Participant 8A wrote pre and post-series, "Based on their actions, views, and words, relative to the 10 Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, Christian view of biblical principles, views of America's Founding Fathers." Identifying their politics with their

11. They identified as a registered Democratic pre-series, but added an explanation post series.

12. Pre-series Participants 1A, 3A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 12B, 13B, 15B, 19B. Post-series Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 10A, 16C. See Appendix C.

faith did not seem to make participants more open to a teaching series on politics. It may have had the opposite effect with some, as they appeared to "double down" on pre-held opinions. Perhaps this was due to feeling certain they already held the correct biblical position.

Some also seemed to vote for candidates and policies using concepts comparable to the common good. For example, pre-series Participant 2A said, "I vote for the candidates/policies that I feel best support and benefit my community." Post series, Participant 2A showed language adoption from my sermon, "Love God & Neighbor." They wrote, "I consider how their policies may impact society and what would be the best course of action to help show God's love to my community." One matching set of answers showed the adoption of common good language at the end of the series. Participant 9A wrote pre-series, "I try to view which of our country's (or state, city) issues are most pressing at the moment, and who the best leader will be to take on those challenges." Participant 9A's answer in the post-series expanded to, "I typically seek good, strong leaders who essentially advocate for the common good- even if I don't agree with all their political views." Part of my goal with this series was to introduce "common good" language, which I can identify among those participants.[13]

The concept of the common good also focuses on protecting the most marginalized in society. Some demonstrated this understanding pre-series. Participant 15B wrote pre-series, "I look at what Christ commands Christians to do....our social obligation, our call to help those in need and to right the wrongs in society."[14] Likewise, pre-series, Participant 5A wrote, "For candidates, I often try to focus on the best person. For policies, I often focus on what does the most good for the most people or what will protect the vulnerable." Post series, Participant 5A

13. See the sermon, "O – Other Peoples' Good" in Appendix A.

14. Unfortunately, I was not able to identify a post-series set of results for this participant.

wrote, “I don’t like candidates who act as though the ends justify the means. Policies I try to figure out what is best for society as a whole. Unfortunately many things get wrapped together and candidates and bill often represent some things I agree with and some things I don’t. . . .” While not true of all, it seems as if many answers lengthened or developed further by series-end.

There were also a variety of specific political issues that seemed to influence political participation and strategy. Pre-series, Participant 4A, wrote generally, “Mostly what their stance is on issues I care about.” Participant 4A added “climate change” as a specific issue post series. As seen in Appendix C, pre-series some listed specific causes, such as “abortion,” or being “pro-life,” “family values,” the “U.S. Constitution,” “Generally utilitarianism,” “character of the candidate,” and “small government.”[15] Participant 6A, who emphasized being pro-life in their pre and post-series surveys, added a self-critique not evident in their first answer set. They wrote, “Though there are both good and bad policies on both sides (Republican/Democrat), I always vote for a pro-life candidate.” Post-series included many of the same issues with Participant 4A’s addition of “climate change.” It seems as if by series-end, many of the answers became less issue-specific and showed more of a process, maybe the beginnings of a framework.

Overall, many seemed to try to use wisdom and discernment. In Participant 10A’s post-series answers, they adopted some of that language, reflecting my sermon on “Understanding & Wisdom.” Explaining how they will determine their vote going forward, Participant 10A wrote, “Well now, I will probably plan to engage more in discussion with other believers. This would be in the realm of seeking wisdom but also to verify that I have the right ‘heart attitude’.” This respondent also acknowledged using a framework, “So my habit has been to look at their past history of political actions, try to determine their motivations for behaviors - self vs others and if

15. See Participants 3A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 11A, 17B, 18B.

their actions and words are/have been consistent with a God centered/Biblical based framework whether they profess that or not." It seems like many participants did shift in a small or thoughtful way, perhaps showing the first recognition of a framework.

Political Sources

Question 8 in the pre-series and 12 in the post-series began to show what sources were shaping the political formation, and thus potentially the spiritual formation of my research study participants. Per "Level of Political Discipleship" and "Level of Equipping" above, if some participants did not feel equipped by the church to address political issues, I was curious to know what was preparing them. The question asked, "What sources have shaped your current political position?" I defined sources broadly.

In the pre-series surveys, 13 of 19, or 68% of participants, listed something Christian as a source for their political engagement.[16] In the post-series survey, 13 of 17 also identified a Christian source, or 76%, an increase of eight percentage points.[17] This could include the Bible, sermons, the church, Christian discussions, a podcast, or anything Christian as a source. Participant 7A seemed to list all the categories in their pre-series answer many of the other respondents mentioned. They wrote, "the Bible, Christian radio, various pastors, friends and family. church groups I have belonged to." Their post-series answer did not show any change. Participant 13B listed *The Gospel Coalition* in their pre-series answers. Participant 9A listed *The Holy Post* podcast in their pre-series answers. They listed it again along with "Chuck Colson" in their post-series answers. Participant 5A mentioned podcasts pre-series, but it did not become apparent until their post-series survey that they were referring to *The Holy Post*. Participant 16C

16. See Participants 1A, 2A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10A, 11A, 12B, 13B, 14B, 15B. See Appendix C.

17. See Participants 2A, 3A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10A, 11A, 12C, 13C, 15C, 16C. See Appendix C.

also mentioned *The* Holy Post in their post-series answers. One of my goals for my series was to introduce participants to quality Christian news analysis. I referenced or recommended *The Holy Post* five times in my series, and while they may have had prior knowledge of this source, I consider this a success.[18]

Other participants showed a diverse group of sources and corresponding opinions. Participant 8A listed very conservative sources, as well as original founding U.S. documents:

> Bible, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, Massachusetts Constitution, Materials from National Center for Constitutional Studies, David Barton's Wallbuilder's Ministry, Jack Van Impe Ministries, D. James Kennedy's Truths That Transform Ministry, Federalist Papers and Anti-Federalist Papers, New American Magazine, Talk show hosts-Howie Carr, Jeff Kuhner, and Jesse Kelly, and Christian radio.

They gave the same answer in their post-series survey. Conversely, Participant 15B, who it is unclear if they were able to complete the post-series survey, wrote:

> I have been disappointed in Evangelical Christians during this past election who have taken a destructive far right position and supported Trump. I follow scientific journals on climate change, read books and articles to stay current on issues. I watch several news sources for a balanced perspective. I have walked away from being an Evangelical Christian b/c I feel the "church" has been misinformed and often have embraced conspiracy theories and a large majority have supported a candidate I feel is the antithesis of what Christians should be supporting.

Another post series respondent, Participant 15C, listed several liberal sources, "My parents, the Democratic party, Jim Wallis/Sojorners, World Relief, The Economist, The NY Times, working for 10 years in international development, authors like Bryant Myers & Brian Fikkert, social justice studies/a Reading the Bible From the Margins course in undergrad..." These contrasting answers show very different political sources translating into different ideologies, all within one

18. See Sermons #3, #4, #6, #8, and #10 in Appendix A.

church body full of people trying to worship together. This shows the need for pastors and churches to help their churches maintain their unity in Christ despite political differences.

Participant 3A, who had not listed anything Christian in their pre-series answer, "Books, media, and college education," wrote in the post-series survey, "My pastor." While it is good that the pastor has become a voice in their process, I hope this is not their only source, which is not what I think they intended to communicate. Conversely, Participant 1A wrote in their pre-series survey, "Listen to sermons. Main stream media." But in their post-series survey, they mentioned close relationships and "local news," nothing overtly Christian. This series did not attempt to identify only Christian sources as worthy sources.[19] Others listed sources less clearly Christian or more secular in nature, such as the news, mainstream media, the newspaper, podcasts, discussions, family, lived experience, college education, and more. Participant 13B identified CNN and Participant 19B Fox News, while the majority listed more general media. This broad mixture reflects the vast diversity of political opinions within the church.

There appears to be no one source outside of perhaps the Bible and a variety of Christian speakers, authors, and friendships, shaping most of the participants' politics. As the Bible was not written as a public-policy manual and does not endorse any-one political party or position, it demonstrates the need for churches to help congregants "bridge the gap" between a 2,000 to 3,000-year-old-book to 21st-century American politics.

Reflecting on "Level of Political Discipleship" above, most respondents did not feel their church of pastor was addressing politics all that often. They gave an average score just under "Sometimes." But it seems Christian resources and the church community are having a shaping influence. They do so through a mixture of intentional and unintentional resources and

19. See "Understanding & Wisdom" sermon.

relationships. I included quality sources in my sermons and the Spiritual Exercises I emailed out in my series. Two respondents in their post-series surveys showed its impact. Participant 12C wrote, "The Mother Teresa speech at the prayer breakfast." Participant 16C wrote, "my [parent], previous pastor, Holy Post podcast, this sermon series!, my [spouse], listening to other sides."

Theological Concepts

In question 9 of the pre-series and 13 of the post-series, I ask, "What specific biblical or theological concepts shape the way you engage in politics?" In this question, I began to see more of the "fruit" of the teaching series as participants identified more flourish concepts and commands in their thinking. For example, Participant 4A wrote in their pre-series answers, "Not sure really. I do think the clear mandate to care for the most vulnerable in society in the Bible shapes my political position."[20] But in their post-series, they wrote, "Before this series, I didn't really see Jesus as engaging much in politics. He said pay your taxes etc, obey the government. However, after the series, I think the Flourish acronym is a great paradigm with which to use to engage." Likewise, Participant 9A, although they had some of the concepts pre-series, like "Love your neighbor as yourself. . . . Being good stewards of His creation. Caring for the poor, the downtrodden. Welcoming the aliens-those from other lands."[21] Post series, the participant added "Image of God" language to their answer. They wrote, "We are all made in the image of God, so that even people who disagree with me are valuable. Moreso, there is usually some good for what others, who have different opinions than me, are advocating."

Of the eleven matching surveys, about 7 of the 11, or 64%, added a concept or command from the series to their engagement. About 4 of the 11, or 36%, stayed the same.[22] Some of these

20. Participant's spelling revised.

21. See "Love God & Neighbor" and "Help the Needy" sermons.

22. Added concept/command: 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 7A, 9A, 10A. Stayed the same: 5A, 6A, 8A, 11A.

biblical or theological conceptual changes were small. For example, Participant 7A wrote pre-series, “Inerrancy of scripture, Ten Commandments.” Post-series, they wrote, “Commandments, sermon on the mount, the way Jesus acted,” including content from my second sermon, “Faith, Not Fear.” I taught on Matthew 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount. Participant 2A simply added in their post-series answer, “I believe we can have a discussion without causing division.” One of my goals was to encourage civility in political discussions in this series.

Additionally, Participant 1A highlighted “Love God and love my neighbor” and “Respect authority” in their pre-series answers, which was a part of the Flourish acronym. However, they added Imago Dei theology post-series, “I like to remember that we are all made in the image of God. That each person is a special, precious part of His creation no matter their beliefs or background.” While Participant 10A identified their pre-series concepts as the ten commandments, responsibility, obedience to authority, the Bible, and prayer, post-series they added several new concepts from the flourish series:

> So many places in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, speak to our responsibility to care for those less fortunate than ourselves. So that is always in the back of my mind. So the commandments to love God (first) with all our heart, soul and mind and (second) our neighbor as ourselves.
>
> After this class I would add a focus on where our allegiance should lie. That Jesus puts this into focus with His admonition to render to Caesar the things of this world and to God our very selves. He “right sizes” human authority.

My perhaps most controversial message was “Reign of Christ,” where I taught on allegiance to Jesus over the kingdoms of this world. The above response shows the internalization of that difficult message. Of the six answers with no identifiable pre-series set, Participants 12C-17C all showed some element from the flourish series. Participant 13C highlighted “the fruit of the spirit,” which I mentioned briefly in “Speak Prophetically.” Participant 15C wrote, “Justice, shalom, Matthew 25/the importance of caring for the poor & vulnerable & exploited.”

Participant 16C included concepts from my final sermon, "A Flourishing Future." They wrote, "being made in the image of God, love of neighbor, trying to bridge the broken present with a perfect future." While I may not have asked participants to recount the Flourish acronym, this question showed the incorporation of flourish concepts into their way of engaging in politics.

As seen in Appendix C, two of the four who stayed about the same as before gave the exact same answer.[23] This, along with their other answers, suggests my series did not add much to their development. Participant 6A focused on the same theme as before, pro-life, but wrote a more extended answer with more biblical examples.

Biblical & Theological Framework

In questions 10-11 of the pre-series survey and 14-15 of the post-series survey, I ask, "Do you have a biblical and theological framework for engaging in faith and politics?" Per Table 5,

Table 5. Do you have a biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics?

	Pre-Series		Post-Series	
Yes (3)	4	21%	9	53%
Maybe/unsure (2)	12	63%	7	41%
No (1)	3	16%	1	6%
Total	19		17	% Change
Average Score	2.05		2.47	20.5%
Class Participation	NA		2.50	22.0%
6 or More Classes	NA		2.70	31.7%
No Class Participation	NA		2.40	17.1%

pre-series, most participants, 12 of 19, or 63%, answered: "Maybe/unsure." Only 4 of 19, or 21% said "Yes," and only 3 of 19, or 16% said "No." Scoring "Yes" as three, "Maybe/unsure" as two,

23. Stayed the same: 5A, 6A; exact same: 8A, 11A.

and “No” as one resulted in an average score of 2.05. Post-series results show a change in perceived framework development.

Post series, 9 of 17 answered “Yes,” or 53%, increasing 32 percentage points. Likewise, 7 of 17 answered “Maybe/unsure,” or 41%, which was a 22 percentage-point decrease. Similarly, “No” decreased from 3 of 19 to 1 of 17, a 10-percentage point decrease from 16% to 6%. When I contrast these answers with Christian Education discussion participation, as previously done in Table 2, Table 5 shows that participating in discussion added to the development of a biblical-theological framework. The average score for all participants in the study series, regardless of discussion participation, increased from 2.05 pre-series to 2.47 post-series, or a 20.5% increase. Those who participated in the class, irrespective of how many times, had a combined score of 2.50, or a 22% increase. However, those who attended six-or-more classes showed the most significant increase in framework development, or at least understanding of what a framework is, to 2.70, an increase of 31.7%. These results seem to affirm the discussion and theological framework aspects of my hypothesis.

Looking at the 11 matching surveys in Table 6, only one of the eleven showed a negative trend, signified by “-” in the table, from answering “Yes” in the pre-series survey to “Maybe/unsure” in the post-series survey. While 4 of the 11 showed no change, signified by “0”

Table 6. Change in biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics.

	Answers	**Percentage**
No to Maybe (+)	1	9%
Maybe to Maybe (0)	1	9%
Yes to Maybe (-)	1	9%
Maybe to Yes (+)	5	45%
Yes to Yes (0)	3	27%
Total	**11**	

in the table, 5 of the 11, or 45%, showed positive framework development, indicated by "+." I classified Participant 10A as "Maybe to Yes." They actually wrote, "I would have said no earlier, but the FLOURISH framework presented in this class will be a starting place for me going forward." Engagement in this series seems to have aided framework development.

In question 11 of the pre-series survey and 15 of the post-series survey, I asked participants to "please briefly explain the biblical and theological concepts and/or framework you use in your political engagement." This question built on the previous two questions. Participant 1A identified their answer as the same as question 13, which asked for concepts. In question 13, they identified the image of God and God's sovereignty over all things as important concepts. In question 15, they added, "I also try to remember the truths in the book of James. I want to listen before responding or acting." While concepts can create a framework, a framework is broader than individual truths or principles, but a set of truths and provides a lens through which to view various political issues. Participant 1A is beginning to form a framework using the image of God, God's sovereignty, and humility, which would align with my "Image of God" and "Reign of Christ" sermons from my flourish framework.

Four of the matching 11 participants originally left this answer blank in the pre-series survey, so I consider them writing anything as a developmental step. For example, one of these, Participant 2A, wrote post-series: "Following what was discussed in the sermon series, I now try to view things from other perspectives than just my own. I strive to understand other points of view. But above all I focus on caring for others as the main framework for how I will engage in the future." As seen in Appendix C, Participant 5A's original answer showed disillusionment with politics and frustration with picking between two bad choices. However, in their post-series

survey, they emphasized going to Scripture, being wise, and "Recognize no one party has claim to God's truth or ways." Perhaps my series helped provide a positive shift in political thinking.

Others did not show a change. Participant 8A resubmitted many of their pre-series answers again in the post-series, including this one. They had a framework, but my series did not seem to add any biblical concepts or commands to their pre-existing framework. They wrote both times, "Thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, dishonor parents. Obey those in government who behave honorably. Forgive as our Lord forgave us. Deal with others in Christian charity, but take courage when facing the enemy. Speak the truth in love. Love as our Lord loves." While their framework matched many of the concepts in the flourish series, this participant had a difficult time with the series due to my critique of "Christian Nationalism" and Christians swearing allegiance to America.[24]

Participant 9A expressed some common good concepts without identifying them as such in their pre-series survey. They noted the complexity of political issues and the importance of "foster[ing] genuine discussion and debate" and "meet[ing] in the middle to work towards solutions." Their post-series answers showed more of the flourishing framework. They wrote, "We should love our neighbor, respect that they are made in the image of God, and do our best to keep in mind the common good when we are in the political process." Participant 11A's post-series survey critiqued big centralized governments. While they identified their conservative ideology with God and Christianity, the biblical connection was unclear, as seen in Appendix C. However, Participant 11A's post-series survey reflected several of the concepts from flourish yet adapted to their previous conservative position. They wrote:

> God gave us both free will and a commandment to love Him and our neighbors. Clearly he wants us to choose to care "for the least of these". He does not command us to force

24. See Appendix C question #9 post-series.

> others to do this, which the imposition of re-distributive taxes (by force) does. Evil means cannot serve Godly ends.
>
> History is clear that we humans are not able to wield significant power over others without it leading to corruption and oppression, we cannot create “a perfect society” here, only the second coming can do that. We should be wary of those who believe otherwise. Their pursuit of "good intentions" always ends in blood and suffering.

Participant 15C drew much different conclusions post-series:

> I have tended to see political participation as a vehicle for ushering in aspects of God's kingdom (particularly the here and now aspects of it, like justice and shalom and how people relate to and treat one another). Jim Wallis/Sojourners really shaped this thinking early in my adult life. Caring for neighbor in tangible, economic, and systemic ways are paramount.

Part of the importance of this series, and the accompanying Christian Education hour, was allowing participants to discuss and hear each other’s thoughts on the wisest paths to addressing social problems. As seen in Appendix C, Participant 13C offered “What would Jesus do?” as their framework, which was a good starting point. Several also pointed to the series in their post-series survey. Participant 12C wrote, “The idea that God is on his own side is basically he is not republican or Democrat neither any other parties. The idea of Speaking Prophetically is speaking boldly and powerfully but truthfully and in a good sense.” Participant 16C just wrote, “I think FLOURISH is a great approach.”

Faithful vs. Unfaithful Christian Participation

In questions 12 and 13 of the pre-series survey and 16 and 17 of the post-series survey, I asked two parts of one extended question. First, I asked, “What should faithful Christian participation in politics today look like?” Then I asked participants to describe “unfaithful Christian participation.” I was hoping to identify any partisan-politics shaping congregants’ engagement and move them towards a framework approach. As seen in Appendix C, most participants emphasized posture over specific policies. The majority saw Christian faithfulness coming down to how Christians engage, their process, and behaviors. Participant 1A wrote post-

series, “I like the idea of grace and truth. That we hold firmly to the truths of scripture, but present those truths with humility and compassion.” Likewise, Participant 4A wrote post-series, “No matter what your political party or how you land on a particular side of an issue, Christians should be gentle, respectful, and consider others first.”[25]

I expected Participant 6A, a participant who had emphasized abortion, to list this issue as part of faithful Christian engagement. I was surprised when they emphasized character and noted the complexity in the world. They wrote post-series:

> I think a Christian's involvement should be with sincerity of heart and conscience and not to try to win but to have the greater good of our world and nation in mind. A politician who is a Christian should consider all the bible has to say about the issues and not choose one good over another. It's almost impossible in the current political climate of our nation.

Participant 7A showed an interesting development in their pre-to-post series survey questions. In the pre-series, they emphasized policy engagement. They wrote, “Voting, calling Senators and representatives about certain issues to ask them to support various pieces of legislation that are biblical and oppose legislation that isn't biblical, speaking kindly to people with opposing views but still speaking the truth (speaking the truth in love), it could involve running for office.” In the post-series, they still emphasized speaking up but cautioned over-engagement, “Standing up for what is right in a kind way. Speaking the truth in love. Remaining engaged in politics while not letting politics take over your whole life.” Similarly, as seen in Appendix C, Participant 10A showed a change from emphasizing political discussion with family and friends in their pre-series to paraphrasing Micah 6:8 in their post-series (“It should involve acting justly (or supporting justice), loving mercy, and walking humbly.”)

25. See also Participants 2A, 5A

Participants 12C through 17C also emphasized Christ-like, or at least civil, behavior as a mark of faithful Christian engagement. Some incorporated specific biblical concepts in their answers. Participant 15C's answers reflected several of my talks: "Treating everyone, especially political enemies, with respect and dignity. Elevating the concerns/needs of those on the outside or cast aside. Pointing to the true kingdom and our true hope, while also seeking to bring good order & beauty here and now."[26] In my "Love God & Neighbor" sermon, I emphasized how Christians should engage in social media, which Participant 17C highlighted, "Faith without works is dead. Politics without works is dead. Stop saying, and start doing. Persistent words of hate and sewing division on social media is not politics, but it is political. Christians should be far above that and concerning themselves with the needs of the most disadvantaged." They also emphasized, "Help the Needy" and the concept of the common good. Per Appendix C, Participant 11A identified conservative policies as faithful engagement.

Conversely, I also asked about "unfaithful Christian participation" in questions 13 and 17. Most participants, again, focused on posture, or way of engaging, over policy in both their surveys. Participant 8A wrote both times, "Mean spirited, vicious, deceitful, self-deceiving, arrogant, covetous." Participant 18B wrote pre-survey, "Arguing, sniping, not acknowledging that others views may also be valid." Participant 5A added pre-series, "Hating, demonizing, violence." Participant 4A noted social media pre-series, "Go to Facebook and you'll see it. Name calling, hateful comments, lack of real dialogue and curiosity to understand another position other than your own." These comments show that most, if not all, of the participants, understood the importance of civility and respectful dialogue, even before my series began.

26. Participant 15A reflects truth from several different messages, including: "Love God & Neighbor," "Image of God," "Help the Needy," "Reign of Christ," and "A Vision of Flourishing."

In their pre-series answers, some also highlighted lack of engagement as unfaithful Christian participation. For example, Participant 16B wrote pre-series, "Christians who abstain from voting." They saw lack of engagement as unfaithfulness. Likewise, Participant 6A said pre-series, "Not studying the policies or the political candidates' views. Being indifferent, not caring, Thinking there's nothing you can do to change the course the world is taking."[27] Post-series they wrote, "Not caring about it at all because a Christian influence is important."[28] Participant 7A added pre-series, "choosing not to vote." Participant 10A gave a similar answer pre-series: "Not being informed. Not engaging in discussion which supports Christian/Biblical values. Not voting. In short - not participating in the process." My series did promote engagement but did not use the typical "Christian values" approach. Instead, I started with Genesis's vision of flourishing as God intended and taught how the Bible might help Christians work towards it.

While the post-series surveys emphasized the need for civility and respect in the political process, I noticed two new themes that participants identified as unfaithfulness: Christian nationalism and an "ends justify the means" way of engaging in politics. Participant 1A wrote in their post-series survey, "One danger is conflating political parties or ideologies with Christian faith. Either thinking one political party/organization represents God or that another is evil. Another would be compromising biblical truth especially for selfish reasons." Participant 2A was concerned that some candidates might have policies aligned with Christian values, but their behavior might be harmful. They wrote about the danger of "Backing a certain political party or candidate regardless of what they say or do. Even though some of their policies may align with Christian perspectives, [the] good may not outweigh the harm they cause to some or even sully

27. James Davidson Hunter might argue that changing the world is incredibly difficult.

28. Wayne Grudem advocates for believers utilizing "significant Christian influence." I do not know if Participant 6A knows of him, but it seems they may have been influenced by that broadly accepted terminology.

the Christian name." Participant 3A wrote, "Worshipping our country over our God." Participant 5A wrote, "… Party above Jesus. Country above Jesus." Participant 17C wrote "Nationalism," which I assume means "Christian Nationalism" from the "Reign of Christ" sermon.

Likewise, Participant 9A showed concern for the "ends-justify-the-means" methodology. They wrote, "Promoting dissension, quarreling, mud-slinging, name-calling Also, the attitude or belief that the ends justifies the means- we need to pass XYZ legislation at all costs." I found this especially interesting because I did not intend to introduce this specific nuance as part of my series. However, one of the participants raised it in class, and it became a point of discussion. Other participants also adopted this principle.[29]

Christian Policies & Platforms

In questions 14-15 in the pre-series and 18-19 in the post series, I assess whether participants see particular public policy as Christian. I ask in 14 and 18, "Are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote for? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation." There seemed to be primarily two types of responses, those who identified one to several traditional evangelical Christian voter-issues or those who do not think there are specific Christian issues.

Participant 7A emphasized traditional Christian values in their pre-series response. They wrote, "Faithful heterosexual marriage; intact families; strong loving family relationships; protection of human life; living peacefully with one another;; promotion of voluntary selflessness, good deeds, care of people in need. I believe these are biblical values. They should be taught in church. The more people who learn them, the better off we will be." Their post-series answers were an abbreviated version. Participant 6A emphasized ending abortion in both

29. See Participants 10A, 16C in Appendix C.

their pre and post-series answers and added at the end, “We can’t all make the offer Mother Theresa made,” which referenced my “Speak Prophetically” message. Participant 11A focused on limiting entitlement programs and a robust national defense. Likewise, 8A included “Life, self-defense, capitalism tempered by 10 commandments, traditional family values, strong military, best Christian candidate.” Participants 8A and 11A identified defense as something Christians should support. While I did not critique this particular political position, I did teach on Jesus’ call to love our enemies in my “Love God & Neighbor” teaching.

Conversely, Participant 13C, in their post-series survey, identified more liberal positions as what Christians should support. They wrote, “Any policies reducing the amount of the U.S.'s greenhouse gas emissions, and plastic production because I would like my kids to be able to go outside.” Likewise, Participants 14B and 15B critiqued evangelical engagement on abortion in their pre-series surveys. Several participants simply answered “no” in their pre or post-surveys.[30] Participant 9A wrote in the end survey, “No- but we should be advocates for the sanctity of life.”

Participant 2A showed a reluctance to label specific policies as Christian. They wrote pre-series, “I don't think there are any clear policies that line up 100% with the Bible. It is important for Christians to focus more on how the policies work towards or against the goal of loving others.” In their post-series response, they wrote, “. . . I think you could disagree and still be a faithful Christian.” Participant 3A fluctuated somewhere between believing Christians should be free to vote how they like and yet still holding onto traditional evangelical Christian values. They wrote at the end of the series, “I don’t think there’s specific things we should vote for. Christians should start with the Bible to come up with their own convictions. I do believe

30. See Participants 4A, 5A, 9A, 18B, 18B, and 19B in Appendix C.

that most Christians should align with the same opinions on things like abortion and caring for the needy." Their answer, perhaps, shows they are still processing.

Several participants also seemed to challenge the very question itself, perhaps revealing a poor choice of wording in the survey. For example, Participant 14B wrote, "No. The world is too grey to make always statements. (E.g. Typical evangelical approaches to abortion don't seem to actual reduce the amount of tragic circumstances)." Likewise, Participant 17C answered, "No. Oversimplification of complex matters to the point of an absolute position is foolish." Reviewing all these answers, my goal was for Christians to show greater civility towards one another. While I could not discern any specific changes, many participants seem to be learning as they go and offering grace to others along the way. Others feel more certain about their convictions. Whether or not my series helped them remains unclear.

In questions 15 and 19, I ask, "Conversely, are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote against? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation." I expected participants to raise the issue of abortion in this and the previous set of questions, and they did, but not all with the same perspective. In questions 15 and 19, 7 of 19 participants raised the abortion topic in the pre-series survey, or 37%. Seven of 17 raised it post-series, or 41%.[31] While I addressed abortion in my Speak Prophetically sermon, we discussed it more in-depth in my "Understanding & Wisdom" class discussion. We debated whether it was a "straight-line" or "jagged-line" from biblical truth to public policy. I was surprised by the variety of opinions.

Participant 4A said that "even the abortion issue" was not something Christians always had to vote against, while Participant 6A said the opposite. Likewise, Participants 7A and 8A

31. Pre-Series Participants 1A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 12B, 13B, 15B. Post-Series 3A, 4A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 13C, 16C.

identified abortion as something to vote against in pre and post-surveys. Participants 12B and 13B also indicated in their pre-series surveys that they would vote against abortion. Participant 16C wrote post-series, "While I don't think I could vote for abortion, i also realizing that voting against is only part of the answer. Loving those that are considering that choice needs to be part of the equation." Their answer showed some of the complexities of abortion and the importance of loving others as believers address the problem.[32] Viewed together, there seems to be a split between those who hold a more traditional understanding of the Bible and abortion and those who want to solve abortion, but perhaps not the typical conservative evangelical way. As seen in Appendix C, some participants did raise other specific issues Christians should vote against, such as Marxism and critical race theory (CRT).[33]

Feelings & Spiritual State

Questions 16 and 17 in the pre-test and 20 and 21 in the post-test surveys are essentially the same question broken up into two parts. First, "How do you feel about someone who generally votes politically opposite/different than you?" Second, "What do you think of the spiritual state of those who generally vote politically opposite/different than you?" Most respondents showed a great deal of respect or charity towards those that might vote different than them. For example, in question 16 pre-series, Participant 12B wrote, "they're entitled to a choice and I realize many come from many different perspectives to vote a certain way."[34] Likewise, Participant 7A wrote pre-series, "How I feel about someone would depend on the particular

32. See also Participant 15B and 14B's answer to question 14 in the pre-series survey in Appendix

33. Pre-Series Participants 8A and 11A.

34. See also Participants 3A, 5A, 13B, 14B, 16B, 17B, 18B, 19B, 12C, and 16C in Appendix C (both pre and post-series answers).

person. I can't make a generalization based solely on them voting opposite/differently than me." They answered similarly post-series.

Other participants expressed respect for those who vote differently as long as those who disagree with them also treated them with civility and respect. For example, Participant 4A wrote in their post-series answer, "It depends on how they treat me. I respect other people's opinions but if they are disrespectful of my opinion then it's hard to interact with that person."[35] I did not detect many noteworthy changes among those who already felt respectful towards those of a different persuasion. The most notable change for this question was Participant 9A, who wrote pre-series, "I am sure that they have (hopefully) good reasons- for the good of our country- for voting the way they do." Post-series they incorporated some language from the flourish series. They wrote, "I think that is to be expected- and we are to love our neighbor and treat them as a person made in God's image."[36]

Among those who felt more strongly about those with whom they disagreed, I could not identify any change due to the series. For example, Participant 8A gave the same answer both times, as they did for much of the survey. They wrote, "Can tolerate, with patience and prayer, those who disagree peaceably. Vicious enemies must be confronted, and prayed for." Participant 6A wrote pre-series, "I feel sad if they are Christian and vote pro-choice." Post-series they showed a willingness to engage and self-reflect: "It depends on the person and where they are coming from. I am learning to try to understand another's persons reasons and not judge them, especially if they are Christians. I never expect a non-Christian to agree with me." Participant 11A tries to assume the best of others and yet strongly disagrees with those who vote differently,

35. See also Participants 1A, 4A, and 15B.

36. See "Love God & Neighbor" and "Image of God" sermons.

as seen in Appendix C. In their post-series answers, they added, “However much I am commanded to love God’s other children, that does not mean I am to tolerate such ignorance as it slowly leads to evil here on earth. We are to resist satan and his works. Progressive policies are clearly of this nature and therefore Christians should resist them.” Surprisingly, they were not the only participant to mention Satan. One wrote: “I feel fine as long as they have a good argument for what they believe. If it is about Satan maybe step away from conversation unless if you stand up [for] Jesus.” Two participants, when asked about those who vote differently than them, connected their post-series answers to the devil. I addressed who our true enemies are, “not flesh and blood,” in my “Love God & Neighbor” sermon and at least one discussion. But perhaps I could have further developed how to think about Satan, partisanship, and politics.

In question 17 of the pre-series and 21 of the post-series survey, I asked participants their opinion of the spiritual state of those who vote opposite from them. I wanted to see if participants were willing to make spiritual judgment calls on others based solely on politics. Most were not willing to make a judgment from these criteria.[37] Others, such as Participant 15C post-series tried to be intentionally gracious: “They're all hopelessly fallen and blind (lol, kidding!). ‘There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ,’ and that includes Christians who vote differently than I do. (I don't always feel this, but I want to, to extend grace & mercy in disagreement).” Others may have given a concession, such as Participant 6A, who identified their opposites as “worldly” in their pre-series survey but then acknowledged that “they are accountable to God and not to me” in their post-series survey. Participant 8A wrote more emphatically, “They are blinded, deceived, and/or self-deceived.”[38] Participant 11A seemed to

37. See Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 10A, 12B, 13B, 14B, 15B. 12C, 13C, 14C, 16C.

38. See also Participant 17C.

dwell in the tension between feeling strongly about politics but trying not to judge others spiritually, as seen in Appendix C. Others appeared to question the question itself, such as Participant 12B pre-series: “Not my place to make a sweeping generalization” and Participant 16C: “Don’t think there is inherently a connection.”[39]

Christian Behavior

I asked in question 18 of the pre-series and 22 of the post-series surveys about Christian behavior in politics. I asked, “How should Christians behave when addressing political issues and disagreements?” Many wrote that Christians should love others, listen well and engage thoughtfully and respectfully.[40] Several of these addressed speaking the truth in love. Participant 10A wrote pre-series, “Listen carefully. Speak thoughtfully, truthfully and considerately. Know when to be quiet and when to speak up. This is difficult!”[41] Giving a similar answer post-series, Participant 15C showed some “Image of God” dignity in their answer. They wrote, “With grace & kindness, as well as boldness. ‘Innocent as doves and as cunning (?) as snakes’ - cunning isn't the right word, but that's the idea. Sometimes we very much need to take a stand for what's right, but we need to do it without destroying the ‘other side's’ dignity and humanity.”

I identified four other participants from the matching set who seemed to incorporate some concept or command from the flourish series into their post-series answer. Participant 2A addressed disagreeing respectfully in their pre-series survey. In their post-series, they added some common good concepts. They wrote, “Attempt to come at the situation with love at the center. Truly seeking what is best for society and the church.” Participant 3A added “Dignity and

39. See also Participant 5A, “No correlation.”

40. See Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 10A, 11A, 12B, 13B, 14B, 16B, 18B, 19B, 12C, 14C, 14C, 15C, and 16C in Appendix C.

41. In Appendix C, see Participants 1A, 7A, 8A, and somewhat 16B.

respect" to their post-series survey, perhaps incorporating the "Image of God" language. Post-series, Participant 5A wrote out the fruit of the Spirit: "With love, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc." While the fruit of the Spirit was not a significant part of my teaching series, I did address it in "Speak Prophetically," and the class discussed it.

Finally, Participant 10A talked about being thoughtful, truthful, and considerate in their pre-series survey but described what I would almost classify as "faithful presence" in their post-series survey, specifically addressing the issue of fear. They wrote, "I think that there is strength in speaking quietly with consistency in holding true to a faith based approach. It also involves not being afraid to engage others in discussion - which involves listening as well as speaking but always speaking truth without compromising that." My series did not dramatically affect participants' behavior in political issues and disagreements. However, it does reaffirm what most of them already knew to be true and broadened some participants' understanding of the concept with the doctrine of the "Image of God," reinforcing the dignity of all humans.

Human Flourishing & Common Good

In question 19 of the pre-series and 23 of the post-series surveys, I asked, "What is your impression and/or understanding of concepts like 'human flourishing' and 'the common good'?" I asked this question to assess participants' familiarity with the terms I used throughout the series. Several participants showed growth in their understanding of these concepts. Participant 1A was "not familiar with these concepts" but in their post-series defined it as "Working towards the good that God intended for us all." Several identified the common good as benefiting the majority.[42] Participant 4A moved beyond critiquing government policies in their pre-series answer to "Human flourishing and common good mean considering others needs and not just

42. In Appendix C, see Participant 2A pre-series, 12B, and 16B.

your own." Participant 5A showed a misunderstanding of the concept of the common good in their pre-series answer: "This is a concept where one seeks the policies that create the most good for the most people. It can be good, but protecting the vulnerable requires this is ignored in those cases." In "Other Peoples' Good," I explained the concept of the common good measures "good" by how well society treats the most vulnerable, the poor, homeless, and marginalized.

Some came into the series with a negative view of these concepts. Participant 7A wrote:

> While these concepts appear wholesome at first glance, I suspect that the concepts of 'human flourishing' and the 'common good' are words to try to convince us that the government should redistribute wealth by taking money from wealthy people and giving it to poor people (stealing??) rather than having people voluntarily contribute money to help others through charities or the church. I fear that the concepts of human flourishing and common good will be used to promote socialism and I don't believe socialism is biblical because the Bible says "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver". While our government and society are not perfect, I don't think socialism is the answer. When the Bible talks about sharing resources, I have only seen it in relation to people within the church. Similarly, I suspect that these concepts may be used to imply that certain races should give up privileges so that people of other races can have those privileges. While there may be a need to help out people who lack resources, this should be based on need, not race.

Participant 7A offered a dramatically different answer in their post-series assessment. They defined these as, "Having not only basic needs met, but opportunities in life, a sense of community, health, a relationship with God."

Participant 8A aligned these concepts with America's Founding Fathers, "Human Flourishing would be near to the Christian Founding Father's description in the Declaration of Independence: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Participant 11A, in their pre-series survey, discussed how difficult it is to know how to achieve these concepts, as so many disagree on what the common good is. But in their post-series, they seemed to adopt language similar to "A Vision of Flourishing." They wrote, "These are concepts that believers should advocate for, as God is working to restore all things." Both Participants 10A and 15C noted in their post-series

surveys that flourishing is not about “quantity of goods” or “economic/material prosperity and individual achievement.” Per Appendix C, Participant 10A defined human flourishing as “the reaching of our best potential as God designed it," and Participant 15C added that we need to show care and concern for our neighbors.

Overall, participants seemed to show an increased understanding of these concepts, even if they could not fully define them in their own words. They also seemed to struggle with how Christians might go about achieving them in a fallen world. Participant 16C demonstrated this ongoing tension in their post-series survey:

> something i've only become familiar with in the last year or so. i think one of the most helpful parts of scripture is where the Bible says God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Recognizing that all are made in God’s image and I should want that image to flourish - but also, realizing that my definition of flourishing is probably distroted/corrupted

While this series did not solve how to achieve human flourishing and the common good, it successfully introduced participants to a more biblical understanding of these concepts.

Clear Changes

While I have tried to identify any changes in thinking throughout this chapter, I did ask this question directly in question nine in the post-series survey. I wrote, “Has anything changed in your thinking as a result of participating in the Faith & Flourishing in Politics sermon series and/or Christian Education class?” I put this question up-front to help participants fully express any changes. Participant 1A identified “No significant changes,” but they did address ongoing political discipleship through their time at Cornerstone. They added, “However, I can say that my thinking on politics has changed significantly since I started attending Cornerstone.” However, others showed changes as a result of this series. Participant 4A wrote, “Yes. The first sermon Jonathan talked about politics needing to be redeemed. I was cynical about politics, but

the series helped me understand politics is broken because the world is broken. So, our politics can be redeemed. Also, the idea that Jesus will make all things new, not all [new things]."[43]

Participant 5A emphasized the class discussion of "the ends don't justify the means." They wrote, "Increased already strong belief that the ends do not justify the means, that how we engage is probably more important than how we vote, that God is interested in, and found in, the journey as well as the destination. We need to end divisiveness. Love is needed more than agreement." Participant 6A, who consistently referenced being pro-life throughout the surveys, wrote, "I have become aware through this series that there are Christians that vote differently than me based on their perception of right and wrong and that their positions are biblically based as mine are." Participant 9A added, "Yes, I do feel more confident to engage in politics because I have a better grasp on faithful responses to political engagement." Participant 10A wrote the most extended response, showing a great deal of internalization:

> Definitely. I think that prior to this series, I was expecting more of a "black and white" decision making guidance from the church and/or the pastorate. Right vs wrong. Now, I realize that it is more of a process. It requires a familiarity with God's word to provide wisdom and to understand how He wants us to treat others, to care for others. And, it requires confidence and conviction in our faith with a courage to listen carefully but to speak truth always being faithful in the big and little moments.
>
> One of the phrases that stuck with me is that decisions come from a "heart attitude". Often, I struggle between the head knowledge and the heart feelings. What is practical and "fair" as opposed to what is for the good of others. And the good of others is not always just giving to them or providing what others think they need. Sometimes "helping hurts".

While some may have preferred a more issues-based specific-guidance approach to political engagement, I was grateful to see Participant 10A's appreciation of my framework approach. Even Participant 11A, who gave opinionated answers both times, showed they were encouraged.

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43. This answer reflected teaching from both "A Vision of Flourishing" and "A Flourishing Future," my first and last messages in Faith & Flourishing in Politics. Participant originally wrote "all things new" twice, but "all new things" reflects what I taught in my final sermon, and I believe is what this participant intended.

They wrote, “I was encouraged to approach those with differing opinions with optimism, remembering God’s love for them and with the hope that we both will shed light on difficult subjects.” Participant 15C likewise wrote, “Yes! I especially loved the Understanding & Wisdom class because of our discussion on the layers between core belief and actual policies. I used to have a more direct line between them, and found it challenging to reconcile different policy positions by Christians.” Participants 12C, 13C, and 16C also showed development.

Others, however, answered “No.”[44] I was disappointed to see that Participant 8A rejected elements of my “Reign of Christ” message. They wrote, “I learned that ‘Christian Nationalism’ is a partisan 'club' now used without and within the church against conservative Christians. The American flag, a symbol of unity and submission to God, honored and died for is now a subject used as a 'straw man' to create division among uneducated believers and non-believers.” While some did not see a change in themselves, their other answers may show some development.

Closing Changes

Participants also had an opportunity to offer other information they wanted me to know in questions 20 of the pre-series and 24 of the post-series surveys. Per Appendix C, most were tangential comments on a variety of issues. However, several addressed the series in their post-series comments. Participant 6A wrote, “I have been challenged to lovingly and respectfully listen to the views of others and to try to understand the biblical perspective of their views. This has benefitted me the most; to change my attitude toward those who disagree with me.” Participant 10A discussed their ongoing tension between prioritizing individual responsibility and God’s command to love others. And Participant 16C wrote, “There has been a big shift in the last several years and I think this series really helped to crystallize some of the points.”

44. In Appendix C, see Participants 3A, 7A, 14C, and 17C.

In question 25 of the post-series, I asked, “Is there any part of the series and class you especially appreciated, disliked, or would recommend changing? Please explain.” Participants 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 9A, 10A, 12C, 13C, 15C, and 16C appreciated my series, specifically naming aspects of it, as seen in Appendix C. Participants 6A, 7A, 8A, 14C, and 17C offered various levels of critiques but also included some agreement. And while Participant 5A had nothing additional to offer, Participant 11A offered a Mark Twain quote, “Mankind's circumstances have advanced, but Man himself has not.” I will draw further conclusions about my thesis-project in my final chapter and reference some of the suggested changes from question 25 there.

CHAPTER FIVE:

OUTCOMES & CONCLUSIONS

> Another sentiment prevalent at the present day that is equally unscriptural and absurd is that the ministers of the gospel ought not to meddle with politics. [W]e see no propriety in the remark; at least, the expression is so vague and indefinite that nothing can be determined by it.
>
> ― Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), *May We Meet in the Heavenly World*

Introduction

In this final chapter, I will analyze the data presented in chapter four and draw some conclusions. I will then evaluate my hypothesis and propose changes to the project as I review the participants' critiques. Finally, I will review how the project affected my ministry, how it might affect others, and what next steps I plan to take. I will close similarly to how I began by sharing more of my political journey and the Doctor of Ministry's impact on my life.

Data Analysis & Conclusions

In chapter one of this thesis paper, I opened by reviewing the need for political discipleship in the church and how the church needs to see this aspect of discipleship as inherent to its mission. Some of the data I gathered seemed to affirm this initial assumption.[1] For example, I discovered a gap between how often participants perceived their churches addressed politics and how equipped participants felt to engage in faith and politics themselves.[2] I assume

1. See questions 2 and 3 in the pre-series and questions 5-6 of the post series.

2. On a scale of 1-5 (5 Always; 1 Never), the participants as a group gave themselves an average score of 2.84 pre-series and 2.94 post-series (3.5% change) on how often their pastor or church addressed political issues. However, they gave themselves an average score of 3.37 pre-series and 3.71 post-series for how equipped they felt to address political issues from a biblical perspective. See Tables 1-2 in Appendix C.

that most, but not all, were reflecting on their time at Cornerstone under my pastorate. The data suggests congregants perceived themselves as equipped, but their equipping was not primarily from the local church body, intentional discipleship, or pastoral care. However, when answering the question about sources, several participants did mention their pastors and churches influencing their political formation.[3] Most of these answers seemed to refer to past church experiences, not Cornerstone.

After reviewing this data at the end of the series, I am led to believe that intentional political discipleship and group discussion can raise the level of equipping for political engagement, even if congregants do not recognize the church or pastor as its source. It seems as if congregants tend to look outside the church for political guidance, sometimes to helpful sources that may further their discipleship and sometimes unhelpful sources. Perhaps, with time, congregants can come to see their churches and pastors as a normal place for political discipleship, and those they look to can recommend trustworthy sources to help participants grow in Christ-like cultural engagement.

An essential aspect of my hypothesis was that teaching my series would help participants grow in their practice of civility in faith and politics. The data shows an 8.1% increase in the possibility of having mutually respectful and beneficial conversations in the church body without causing division.[4] However, one participant who was strongly pro-life reported a decrease in this area, perhaps because my series was not framed around this particular issue.

When I asked what faithful and unfaithful participation in politics looked like, many of the participants emphasized the importance of civility, even those who were more partisan in

3. See question 8 pre-series and 12 post-series.

4. See question 4 pre-series and 7 post-series.

their ideology.[5] Two participants noted the importance of civility in social media, which I addressed in the series.[6] I also asked a question about Christian behavior in political disagreements.[7] Many participants emphasized Godly behavior as part of political engagement, such as speaking the truth in love. I was pleased that some of my participants seemed to recognize the risks not only of mean-spirited politics but the corruptible nature of power, and how believers achieve their goals matters as much as accomplishing their goals.

Upon reviewing the data, I do not think my teaching series dramatically affected participants' support of or belief in Christian civility in politics. Most seemed to already see it as necessary. However, I do think that my teaching and our discussions deepened some participants' understanding of the doctrines that undergird human dignity, such as the image of God and loving our neighbors, as well as the problem of ends-justify-the-means engagement.

When I assessed most participants' political parties, most identified as independent. However, when I asked them to identify their political ideology, about 50% identified as conservative to moderately conservative. Another 40% identified as moderate. While it did not seem that political party was a primary issue in engagement, it appeared that political ideology had a much more significant role. Most, but not all, of those who identified very conservatively appeared to have difficulty with some of the content matter presented in *Faith & Flourishing in Politics*.[8] I did not take a more traditional conservative approach to political engagement, which would have focused more on Christian rights, family values, and abortion. Perhaps they may have felt more comfortable if I had done so. Some of the conservatives who identified their

5. See questions 12 and 13 pre-series and 16 and 17 post series.

6. See Participant 17C post-series survey, question 16. See also Participant 4A pre-series question 13.

7. See question 18 pre-series and question 22 post series.

8. Participants 6A, 7A, 8A, 10A, 11A, 14C, and 16C.

politics more closely with their faith seemed to "double-down" on their pre-held opinions. Perhaps they felt sure they already held the correct biblical position.

Conversely, Participant 10A, the only participant to identify as both Republican and Conservative, showed some of the greatest humility and teachability among all the participants, so I cannot, "paint with broad brush strokes." However, those who were more politically moderate seemed to have an easier time interacting with my content. I believe that most participants, if not all, took something away from the series, even if it was not what they expected or preferred.

I hoped to direct my participants towards Christian sources centered around human flourishing and the common good throughout my series. Several participants engaged with *The Holy Post* podcast, which aligns with this emphasis. It was interesting to see the wide divergence of political sources, some very conservative and some very liberal.[9] This array led me to conclude that there are very different perspectives and opinions even within such a small church. One of the local church's jobs should be to help people with such differing viewpoints worship together and encourage one another in the same church body. While the Bible was a source for many participants, those participants often held differing conclusions about how the Bible addressed politics. While this did not validate, invalidate, or alter my hypothesis, it did show the need for churches to cultivate Christ-centered unity within a diversity of views.

As previously discussed in chapter four, participants in the study showed an increase in theological concepts and the beginning stages of framework development due to the series.[10] Several participants added new concepts to their frameworks, such as the *Flourish* acronym, the

9. Participants question 8 pre-series and question 12 post-series.

10. See question 9 of the pre-series and question 13 of the post series.

image of God, caring for the poor, loving God and neighbor, allegiance to Christ over country, the fruit of the Spirit, right-sizing human authority, and hope in a flourishing future.[11] Of the eleven matching surveys, about 7 of the 11, or 64%, added a concept or command from the series, even if they were small additions. While my series did not give everyone new concepts, it seems to have helped a significant portion of the group. Some I could not tell if they added or not, as they were part of the non-matching set.

My teaching series gave the research group a 20.5% increase in self-perceived framework development.[12] This includes a 31.7% increase for those who participated six or more times in class discussions. This data shows that my teaching series, especially the discussion time, helped participants develop a biblical and theological framework for engaging in faith and politics. Various participants identified either the *Flourish* framework itself or truths from the series, such as God's sovereignty, personal humility, the image of God, the reign of Christ, speaking prophetically, and more as the theological truths they learned.[13] However, some closed themselves off to my framework.

As previously reviewed, when I assessed faithful versus unfaithful Christian participation, participants most commonly identified civil behavior as part of faithful engagement. Some identified post-series some of the concepts I had taught during the series, whether civility, Christian nationalism, the problem with ends-justify-the-means theology, or concepts deriving from the doctrine of the image of God.[14] Others maintained their pre-series

11. See post-series question 13, Participants 4A, 9A, 10A, and 13C-17C, who were not matching.

12. See questions 10-11 pre-series and 14-15 post series.

13. See Participants 1A, 5A, 10A, 13C, 15C.

14. See Participants 1A, 3A, 5A, 9A, 15C and 17C.

convictions. While my series did not convince everyone, it did seem to help several identify faithful Christian participation beyond simply voting on one issue or for one political party.

When I assessed what policies or platforms participants identified as Christian, participants were either unwilling to identify causes as specifically Christian or identified more traditional conservative evangelical causes.[15] It is unclear whether my series changed participants' views of policies, which would make sense, as I did not focus primarily on policies. Instead, I was trying to direct participants towards a more principled or framework-driven approach. It appears some participants came to a better understanding of why believers should be wary of identifying specific policies or positions as specifically "Christian" in nature and the importance of wisdom and understanding in public-policy decision-making.[16]

When I assessed participants' feelings about and perceptions of the spiritual state of those who disagree with them, most were unwilling to judge others, including their spiritual condition, on politics alone.[17] Two, however, identified the actions of others as Satan's involvement in politics. The answers to these questions did not help me identify what participants truly thought of the spiritual state of others. However, I found some of their feelings elsewhere in the series, such as when I assessed faithful participation and the role of wisdom.

Two vital concepts in my teaching series were human flourishing and the common good.[18] While some pre-series generally understood the idea of trying to find the best solution for the most people, at least one looked on these ideas with suspicion. But as a result of going through this series, several participants were able to express a more biblical understanding of

15. See questions 14-15 pre-series and 18-19 post-series.

16. See Participant 15C question 9 post-series.

17. See questions 16-17 pre-test and 20-21 post-test.

18. See question 19 pre-series and question 23 post-series.

human flourishing and the common good. The one who had expressed suspicion looked on these ideas favorably, even though they resisted other parts of my series.[19] I did not identify in the participants as nuanced an understanding of the common good as I would have liked, especially its emphasis on protecting the poorest and most vulnerable. However, it seems as if participants finished the series with a better understanding of these concepts overall.

In conclusion, the data shows a variety of small to significant shifts in participants' thinking on Christian political engagement. Those who seemed more confident in their political ideology, and faith-based approach, coming into the series seemed to have a more difficult time with the content. Those with moderate views seemed to engage more easily. While no one walked away identifying each element of the *Flourish* framework as their framework, most grew or developed in some ways, incorporating new biblical and theological concepts.

Hypothesis Evaluation

I hypothesized that the direct teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good have given Cornerstone Congregational Church a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics. Upon reviewing the data, it appears this hypothesis was partially validated. My project did help congregants develop a biblical and theological framework, but only some gained a whole new framework. The extent of framework development varied by the individual participant. Some seemed to respond well and learn a lot, while others resisted and only showed small changes. Many participants showed an increased understanding of human flourishing and the common good. However, most, if not

19. See Participants 7A (expressed suspicion), but also 11A, 10A, 15C, and 16C post-series.

all, already believed in the importance of engaging civilly in faith and politics. However, their understanding of why to engage civilly developed using the doctrine of the image of God.

While there may have been more noticeable changes to participants' political frameworks if I had accurately matched all participants' surveys, I could not determine this due to an omission on the initial survey. I also could have done a better job assessing whether participants could recall the *Flourish* acronym from memory but did not realize this missed opportunity until it was too late.

Two of the most critical aspects of this series were the direct teachings and group discussions. While preaching the sermon series did help some research study participants, it seems clear that more participation in group discussions and its additional teaching was key to growth. The opportunity to dialogue, and engage, even amid disagreement, produced the most notable changes among the measurable data.

In conclusion, I would gladly use this format again to initiate political discipleship in the local church setting. This format allowed many participants to "dip their toes in the water" of political discipleship without feeling like they were being "soaked" with a political agenda. However, if I were doing it for a study, I would update some of my survey questions to obtain further definitive results.

Critiques & Recommended Changes

While most participants appreciated my series and highlighted aspects of it, some offered critiques. First, I will review their feedback from question 25 post-series, and second, I will add my suggestions on what I could change.

In question 25, Participant 6A wrote, "I felt there was much more of an emphasis on getting us to change our point of view on the social justice issues (which I think we need to do),

and not enough emphasis on abortion." Before I created the F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H. acronym, I'd initially meant to teach a whole acronym in one sermon, using the word L.I.F.E., which would have had a much more pro-life orientation. However, as I continued to develop my thinking about the series and on abortion, I reworked the series itself. I would like to have emphasized the importance of life in all stages but did not feel I had the space or time to do so. Perhaps this is something I could better emphasize or explain in a book. However, if I had addressed the issue of abortion, Participant 6A may not have liked my approach. I believe there are productive ways to reduce abortions without criminalization. Through resources like Tremper Longman III's, *The Bible and the Ballot*, and *The Holy Post*, I have come to believe there are productive responses to abortion besides the typical approach of outlawing abortion and overturning Roe vs. Wade.[20] This is why I used Mother Teresa as a starting point, as her response highlights the personal actions Christians can take.

Participant 7A asked me to stop identifying the events that transpired on January 6th, 2021, as an insurrection. They then explained how the Trump supporters did not bring guns and that many were walking through the Capitol respectfully. In response, I will continue to identify the events of January 6th, 2021 as an insurrection, even a Christian insurrection, and feel correct doing so based on evidence and sources presented in chapter one and additional sources I have encountered.[21] In addition, I believe it is unwise for Christians, especially Christians who may

20. See Phil Vischer, Skye Jethani, Kaitlyn Schiess, "Holy Post Episode 473: Did Texas End Abortion? & Drug War Casualties with Christina Dent," *The Holy Post* podcast, September 8, 2021, https://youtu.be/lNS_9VtoEyM. See also Phil Vischer and Skye Jethani, "What About Abortion? Should this one issue determine how Christians vote?" *Holy Post*, October 17, 2020, https://youtu.be/RvWD7ykNjCc.

21. See the HBO documentary, "Four Hours at the Capitol," 2021, https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/four-hours-at-the-capitol. See also a study of Christians at the January 6th riot at Uncivil Religion, University of Alabama and Smithsonian National Museum of American History, https://uncivilreligion.org.

empathize with the sentiments expressed that day, to "sugar coat" or re-interpret the events that transpired in a more positive light. It reflects poorly on our evangelical Christian witness.

Participant 7A also critiqued my teaching on Romans 13, suggesting that believers only have to submit to "GOOD governments," and then saying I could have explained more clearly when believers obey the government and when they should submit. While I maintain my interpretation of Romans 13, I agree I could spend more time explaining the passage, when to obey and when to resist, and how to do so. Perhaps I could clarify further in a book.

Participant 8A wrote, "Christian voter guides are not anathema to Bible believing political involvement." I critiqued the one-sided nature of many voter guides in my seventh sermon in this series. I never said they were "anathema" but did express concern about their typical partisan approach. I maintain this critique.

Both participants 14C and 17C had similar critiques. Participant 14C wrote:

> I struggled with every sermon to figure out where the "politics" was. I had to tune into the class discussion to get the connection. As someone mentioned, it probably would have been good to define "politics" up front so we could make the connections with each sermon. It almost seemed like you were being overly cautious, not wanting to bring up political differences or how to specifically have politically-based conversations in such a public platform.

Likewise, Participant 17C wrote, "The series lacked some tactical substance. Addressing specific issues with some level of conviction and practical application of the faith-based framework would've been more impactful, memorable, and practically useful even if listeners did not fully agree with the conclusion." While I taught a biblical and theological framework, I did not address specific political topics in-depth, such as abortion, gun control, or immigration. Upon concluding this series, I felt it was a "primer" for a congregation to then address politics in-depth. Another term I might use is a "political catechism." My series lays a theological foundation but does not directly address what most people perceive as politics.

It would be ideal to follow this 10-week foundational series with a 10-week topical series addressing specific political issues using the *Flourish* paradigm. This would allow sufficient time to put the series into practice and "plumb the depths" of some of these flourishing concepts. Unfortunately, a 20-week series could be very taxing on a local congregation. It would likely need to be split up with a different series in between, potentially resulting in loss of knowledge and learning from part one. If this series was taught in a small group format, 20-weeks may be a little more doable but would still be a commitment most participants would be unable to make.

As I reflect on this series, I recognize some weaknesses in the content. I only briefly talked about the "already, but not yet," and would like to further develop that concept's application to politics. Perhaps this is something I could develop better in a book. I am also still wrestling with when Christians should "speak prophetically" against social evils and when they should primarily practice "faithful presence." Otherwise, Christians may risk only speaking up on those issues they favor. There is no clear answer, and perhaps I should have identified that ongoing tension and paradox more clearly.

While I have noted some of the changes I would like to make, one of the weaknesses I noticed while doing the series was in myself. When I started receiving initial pushback, whether real or imagined, I spent too much time defending my positions from scripture in my Christian Education hour. This is especially evident in my "Reign of Christ" Christian Education hour slides. I was nervous about discussing Christian nationalism and patriotism, so I spent too much time showing the kingdom of God in scripture. While this was a Sunday school setting and so justifiable, the more time I spent teaching, the fewer time participants had to discuss and wrestle with the difficult content.

The class discussed patriotism in the Christian Education discussion following the "Reign of Christ" sermon. I defined patriotism as the "Love of a people and place (not state and power)."[22] One participant remarked that their understanding of patriotism also included "love of principles," the American ideals they believe make this country great. I agree in part and will alter my definition of patriotism when I teach it again.

My Ministry & Others

My Ministry

If I had known the amount of time, effort, and work my Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) would take, I am not sure I would have begun the program. But, now, as I draw to a close, I am grateful for the process and results. As I think about my ministry, Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA, I realize that many of the topics that have arisen through my D.Min class-time have helped me pastor and lead my congregation at just the right time. As I look at our nation, its political turmoil, and the effect that it is having on my local community and others, I genuinely believe my D.Min project is more valuable than ever.

It was not easy doing this project in a local church setting. Many seemed to express nervousness and mistrust around me doing this topic. Yet, I believe it was beneficial, and I think helpful, for the local congregation. Not everyone responded well, and sometimes people said discouraging things, but I am grateful I pressed onward. Those who wanted to learn, and had teachable hearts, really seemed to grow and flourish in this series. One participant, who had shown resistance to some of my ideas, expressed a great deal of gratitude for the opportunity to talk about politics with other church members. They suggested the church organize an ongoing

22. See the Reign of Christ sermon in Appendix A for the sources of my definition (Miller & Kristian).

group to meet and talk about the news and politics so they could hear others' opinions. While I have approached my Board of Elders with this idea, we have not yet made any formal plans.

Besides debriefing the news together, there are various ways we as the Cornerstone church community could continue to practice political discipleship. We could read and discuss political theology books, such as those recommended in this chapter. We could listen to *The Holy Post* podcast and discuss. We could host panels to discuss hot-topic political issues, invite other clergy members from Westford faith communities to contribute, and so model civility. Perhaps we could do another sermon series on faith and politics in a year or two, but this time address particular political issues. And, in the ordinary preaching and teaching of the church, we can continue to address political discipleship as biblically faithful opportunities arise.

One of the difficulties of continuing what I have begun in my context is that I am stepping down from my pastoral position this summer. We are not leaving due to a poor reception to my political discipleship; overall, the congregation received it very positively. Rather, we sense a call to move closer to family in Colorado. Perhaps the next pastor will build on this foundation and utilize the framework and practices we learned. I hope to make political discipleship an ongoing aspect of my life and ministry wherever the Lord leads next.

Similar Ministries

I believe the approach I took, preaching a sermon series and running a Christian Education hour class discussion, is an easily replicable format for laying a foundation for engaging in faith and politics in a local church setting. Whether the church is big or small, this format is scalable. Part of the benefits of being in a small church environment is that there may be more opportunities for personal conversations. Strong relationships should help aid the political discipleship process. I do sense that our congregation, while right-leaning, is more

moderate than most evangelical Christian churches. So, I would assume a more conservative church might have a harder time if taught comparable content.

Political discipleship is messy discipleship. It is complex and difficult. It will always be intimidating for pastors to engage in inflammatory topics like politics. To do so risks their jobs and the church's unity, but if scripture addresses it, so must the church. When pastors and churches address cultural engagement, the Lord may grant radical transformation among the members. He also may only grant marginal 1-2 degree shifts in church members' postures. While that might not seem like much, a slight change in direction can lead to a very different destination over time. I hope the pastors who read this paper and listen to my sermons will feel more courageous doing the hard, messy, but necessary work of political discipleship. I will discuss other ways I may help assist them in "Next Steps" below.

Less Similar Ministries

The benefit of preaching a framework paradigm is that it is flexible and not limited to a particular time or context with its unique political issues. For example, if I had preached a topical series on gun control, the drinking age, or taxation, there are no guarantees those issues would be the same in the news in five, ten, or twenty years from now, or across the ocean in a different context. But to preach solid biblical and theological truths adds to its longevity and flexibility, not only to help contexts similar to Cornerstone's but also those in other contexts. I believe the *Flourish* paradigm could benefit not only churches in America but also Europe and other non-western parts of the world because these truths are rooted in scripture. Perhaps the *Flourish* acronym would have to be adapted to a flourish-like concept in their local context and language. Otherwise, I believe the key concepts could prove beneficial in much different contexts.

Next Steps

I wrote an article for *Small Town Summits* entitled "The Heart of Political Discipleship in Small Churches" to reflect on my series and encourage other pastors to the work of political discipleship.[23] I also recorded an audio reading of the article and posted it on *YouTube*.[24] One of the reasons I have used the words "political discipleship" so often is that I think it is a word pastors and churches need to become comfortable using. Much like "whole-life discipleship," I believe we need to see it as our job to disciple people in their politics. I want to continue to help churches, ministries, and pastors grow in this area, so I also intend to make an audio recording of each of the five chapters of my thesis paper. I hope to post those on *YouTube* to make my research and findings accessible to other ministry leaders.

I have included a list of "Recommended Resources" below and posted my *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* sermon series on *YouTube*, as seen in Appendix D. I have also created a "Faith & Flourishing in Politics" *Facebook* page and *Facebook* group where I post sermons belonging to myself and others that model good political discipleship. I also post book recommendations and helpful articles. While this is a small contribution, I hope it builds to writing a book using the *Flourish* acronym. I wrote my sermon manuscripts to be the first drafts of the chapters of a book. I hope that other churches, pastors, and ministries could use the finished product to do the actual work of political discipleship in their contexts. I hope to add small group discussion questions, additional resources, and everything churches need to host the

23. Jonathan Romig, "The Heart of Political Discipleship in Small Churches," Small Town Summits, January 1, 2022 https://www.smalltownsummits.com/archives-2/2021/12/30/the-heart-of-political-discipleship-in-small-churches. See Appendix D for hyperlink.

24. "The Heart of Political Discipleship in Small Churches (Small Town Summits Article)," Jonathan & Monica Romig YouTube, published February 23, 2022 https://youtu.be/LnOR_5SY9Wg.

conversation. While this resource would not address every aspect of political engagement, it could become a "primer" for political discipleship in the church.

I have considered founding a nonprofit entitled *The Center for Political Discipleship*. Its mission would be to better equip pastors and churches to address faith and politics from a biblical, non-partisan, theological approach, utilizing resources like the ones mentioned in this paper. I see my *Facebook* page as the potential starting point for something to emerge. I have also considered shifting careers and working for a nonprofit in this area, but the Lord would have to call me to that. I believe pastors who are doing the hands-on work of political discipleship have more credibility and experience to show other pastors how to do the same.

Recommended Resources

I am incredibly grateful to any reader who has made it this far. Lord willing, the act of reading this thesis paper has helped refine and develop your thinking around political discipleship. While many of the resources in the bibliography would prove helpful for taking the next steps to do political discipleship, I recommend the following curated resources:

1. *News & Commentary* – While you could not have gotten this far without realizing how partial I am to *The Holy Post* podcast, I would like to recommend it again. As long as Phil Vischer, Skye Jethani, Christian Taylor, and Kaitlyn Schiess create new content with humor and grace, this is a worthwhile podcast for analyzing the news. Similarly, I have found *thedispatch.com*, overseen by David French, to be a helpful news source. While conservative, it tries to be fact-based. For those trying to identify the bias in their news sources, allsides.com may also prove useful. Finally, *Christianity Today* is very good.

2. *Foundational Paradigms* – While it is an in-depth book, I highly recommend James Davidson Hunter's *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of*

Christianity in the Late Modern World (368 pages). Hunter lays out the idea of "faithful presence" and explains why other approaches have not worked from a historical and biblical perspective. For a much simpler primer that has some of the concepts of this book, I would recommend the self-published Kindle-only book, *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* by Skye Jethani (64 pages). Timothy Keller's *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your* City, specifically chapters 16-18 of his red 2012 edition, also helps distinguish between the different paradigms.[25] Finally, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* by Miroslav Volf shares many similarities and is also helpful (193 pages).

3. *Church Resources* – If you are looking for a book that addresses specific political issues, I recommend Tremper Longman III's *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (329 pages). He is an Old Testament scholar dedicated to the Hebrew scriptures. Kaitlyn Schiess has also made a valuable and engaging contribution with *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (207 pages). Another popular contribution is Eugene Cho's *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: a Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics* (274 pages). While coming from a liberal perspective, I also very much enjoyed Jim Wallis's*, The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (322 pages). Any of these books could be great for discussion in a book club or small group. If you are looking for a political discipleship curriculum, I have witnessed another pastor have success with *The Colossian Forum*'s "Political Talk," which a *WSJ* article featured.[26]

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25. Chapter 16: The Cultural Responses of the Church. Chapter 17: Why All the Models Are Right . . . and Wrong. Chapter 18: Cultural Engagement Through Blended Insights. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 194-245.

26. Janet Adamy, "Abortion, Guns and Trump: A Church Group Tries to Navigate America's Divisions," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/abortion-guns-and-trump-a-church-group-tries-to-navigate-americas-divisions-11608298552. Thank you Shea Fitzgibbons for letting me sit-in twice.

4. *Sermons & Series* – Finally, I believe what I have created in my *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* sermon series could benefit other pastors, ministries, and churches trying to navigate political discipleship. See Appendix D for links to sermons and manuscripts. You can also find recommended resources matching each sermon theme in the video descriptions. Additionally, I've created a *YouTube* playlist entitled "Sermons, Lectures, & Panels on Christianity & Politics" that includes many of the sermons I recommended to my congregation during my series as well as additional resources.[27] To start, listen to Tim Mackie's "Lecture on the Early Church & Politics" and Jon Tyson's "The Controversial Jesus – Jesus and Politics."

The Journey Onward

In the summer of 2018, I sat down to write a book I planned to entitle "The Political Platform of Jesus Christ." In this book, I was going to definitively establish "once and for all" which way Christians should vote on all the hot-topic political issues. I wrote one chapter on gun control and another on the kingdom of God. Then my phone rang with an invitation to start a Doctor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS). I had begun writing that book because I felt incredibly frustrated with the way evangelical Christians were engaging in politics. It seemed to me like we had "sold our birthright for a bowl of stew." And if I was going to write this book, I wanted to do it well, so I said yes. I figured a Doctor of Ministry would force me to do better research and to think more deeply, and it lived up to those expectations.

Now, knowing what I know, I am not going to write that book. And while I am still frustrated with the way many Christians engage in politics, I feel I have also grown in my understanding of how and why people engage in politics the way they do. I also recognize there

27. *YouTube*: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlh10daFZGDJmTJOjTnmOCjBBnD4xvtfS.

is a gap between what the Bible says flourishing is and actual public policy and politicians. Many Christians use the wisdom and understanding they have to navigate that gap. Part of my job, then, is to help congregants grow in their wisdom and understanding, helping them apply the Bible to our modern cultural context. Over time the church has outsourced that discipleship to cable news, talk radio, and political parties instead of training congregants to navigate it with God's word, their church community, the Holy Spirit, and plenty of wisdom. I believe God has uniquely gifted and called pastors to shepherd their congregations, even in politics. But if I am going make such bold claims, I need to walk that path too. I need to do the hard, messy, and often fruitless work of political discipleship. This is what I have studied for the last four years.

The journey has not been easy, especially as politics are always inflammatory, and the traditional approaches to Christian engagement are as forceful as ever. This journey has also been incredibly personal. I have watched as those I love have taken different faith-based political positions, which have led to vastly different results. Like many American families, some in my family favored the Covid vaccine, and others did not, and a mixture of political ideology and Christianity played a large part in that. My father, a man who loved Jesus and whom I deeply love and respect, chose not to get the vaccine. He died of Covid on September 1st, 2021.

As anger washed over me in those initial days, weeks, and months, I had trouble identifying who exactly I was angry at. I had approached my dad about the vaccine before he caught Covid. Our brief interactions were not about medical advice but politics and theology. Why had something so science-based become so partisan, often with Christians strongly disagreeing? Who was to blame? Those I love? The evangelical church? The wider culture? One or both political parties? I know I am not alone in this hurt. There are many families who have

lost loved ones, or been hurt in other ways, often from a confusing mixture of religion and politics. Many Christians swimming in the riptide of ideology have been swept away.

In a situation like that, who do you forgive? I was angry with my father, and yet I forgave him, and I was able to tell him that before Jesus took him home. As I grieved the loss of my dad, my wife Monica and I felt like my thesis-project mattered more than ever. Pastors and churches needed to start doing discipleship in politics, even as it hurt.

And so, one month after my dad died, I launched a ten-week sermon series entitled *Faith & Flourishing in Politics*. Those ten weeks were some of the most rewarding yet truly hard weeks of preaching, teaching, and facilitating I have ever done. I gained weight. I lost sleep. I nearly had a nervous breakdown. I put so much time and energy into preparing; it felt like everything had to be perfect. It never was, and yet, God worked through it. He produced the fruit. While some resisted or needed more time to process, I believe the Spirit will bear fruit in them in God's timing. And yet, many were ready to grow and excited by what I taught. My series seemed to give them hope that there might be a better way to engage in faith and politics going forward. I believe there is a life-giving way, a way for the common good, the way of flourishing. Blessed be our God and Father who will one day turn a vision of flourishing into the fullness of reality.

Thank you for reading. If you would like to ask questions, discuss my research, or share how my studies have impacted you, please email me or visit my *Facebook* page or *YouTube* channel: *Jonathan & Monica Romig*.[28] God bless you and may you flourish.

28. See the VITA at the end of this paper for my contact info.

APPENDIX A:

TEACHING SERIES

In the following pages, I have included my sermon manuscripts, their corresponding slides, and their accompanying Christian Education hour class-slides. I have kept them as similar as possible to when I originally used them to preach and facilitate class; and how I posted them to CornerstoneWestford.com (see Appendix D). I have included a copyright notice I posted with my sermon slides, and have removed it from the other lessons. I included the copyright notice to help safeguard my work for turning the written and posted content into a book. I have not reviewed and cited my endnotes to the same level as my thesis bibliography since this is how I published them to my congregation. The "(S1) (S2) (S3)" and so on markers refer to the slides I clicked on as I preached. I have also removed all hyperlinks, which I inserted into my sermon for the website to help church members find quality sermons, articles, books, and other resources. I have also made several other minor edits to save space.

Genesis 1-3

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
A Vision of Flourishing

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / October 3rd, 2021

(S1-2) If you were to describe our nation's political landscape, how would you depict it? Would you describe amber waves of grain and a fruited plain like *America the Beautiful* sings? Or maybe more likely, you would describe a barren desert with a tumbleweed blowing by, a snake slithering under a rock, and a lone cactus. I imagine most of us today feel politics are more like a desert than a field of wheat.

But what if, as you were looking at that political desert, you spotted a small, wiry tree breaking through the hard desert sand? Would that, could that, inspire you? What if you could slowly, with lots and lots of work, transform a small patch of that desert into a garden? Would you do it?

For one retired couple in northern China, that's not a rhetorical question. **(S3)** A husband and wife have spent fifteen years slowly transforming the desert into a forest again by planting and watering drought-resistant saxaul trees.[1] **(S4)** Saxaul trees look like big scrubby bushes, but they can grow large enough to provide shade and life to the desert. This couple has spent fifteen years planting trees and watering them. It has cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the desert winds have blown over many trees. But despite hardship and setbacks, this couple has transformed 165 acres of desert into a forest.[2] When they looked at the desert, they had a vision of a garden forest, and it changed everything.

When I go on social media, click on my favorite websites, or listen to the news, I sometimes feel like it's a desert. It seems like everyone is arguing and fighting, and nothing good is growing. But what if we as Christians could envision a flourishing garden? What if God calls Christians to do the hard, slow, painstaking labor of trying to transform our world from a desert into an oasis?

That would be incredibly difficult and might not succeed. That couple lost many trees. But maybe, just maybe, we could transform a small corner of our desert, 100 acres, into something greener. Did you know the Bible starts in a garden? And it's actually in the garden that God introduces government. Before any city or society, God introduced the concept of rule, ordering our world, of politics.

(S5) God created politics to help creation flourish.

Do you think politics are a bad joke? "What do you get when you mix religion and politics?... Politics."[3] Or maybe you think of politics like nuclear energy. Can be great, but didn't we use it to invent the atomic bomb? Did you know that God actually invented politics, and he only invents things with creation's good in mind? In Genesis one, God took a chaotic and formless void and created the planets, the stars, the oceans, fish, land animals, the sky, and birds. It was like God took a barren desert and made a flourishing garden. And then, you know what he did? He invited a man and a woman to come and tend the garden with him.

(S6) Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)
26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

(S7) 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

When God made men and women in his "image" (v26-27), he granted them his divine authority to care for creation. To be made in God's image meant you could rule creation like God, bringing order to the chaos. In fact, God gave humankind "dominion" (v26, 28) over the whole world. But "dominion" isn't "exploitative lordship" but "stewardship."[4] We were supposed to take the messy goodness of creation and play with it and order it and bring out even more goodness.

That word for "fruitful" (v28) means "flourish."[5] To not just milk everything you can out of creation, but to cultivate creation, society, culture, and government to reach its highest and best potential. That's what we today might call the "common good," or the Bible calls "shalom." We'll review both of those ideas more later in this series. To steward creation, to make it flourish, is to take what God made and bring out its best.

(S8) I drove up to the White Mountains this summer and hiked in Crawford Notch State Park. In 1771, there was nothing there but beautiful mountains, forests, boulders, rivers, and a notch, like a pass. But a hunter named Timothy Nash envisioned a road there. He'd heard about a "route through the mountains mentioned in Native American lore" and set out to make it a reality.[6] Governor John Wentworth made him a deal to grant Timothy Nash some land to live on and build the road through the pass if he could get his horse through it first. So that's what he did. He found the tamest farm horse he could find and hauled him through. Sometimes they even needed ropes to lower him down boulders.

But now, 250 years later, it's clear that Timothy Nash's vision of bringing order to the chaos has become a reality. Now you can drive a beautiful winding highway, hike Mt. Willard, Mt. Avalon, and other trails, **(S9)** ride the cog railway to the top of Mt. Washington **(S10)** and stay at the Mount Washington Hotel. People took what God made and cultivated it so we could enjoy it even more, and that's what God intends for politics. *God created politics to help creation flourish.*

So, what the heck happened? Why is politics a joke? Why have politics gone nuclear? Why are we living in a political desert? Politics don't feel ordered today but chaotic. What went wrong?

(S11) Human selfishness corrupted the good of politics.

When God called Adam and Eve to guard and steward the garden, he gave them just one command. Don't eat from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). But really, it was a question, "Do you want to do this with me, or on your own?" God wanted to know if they would rule his way, according to his laws, or if they would do it their own way. Isn't that the question we've all been answering? Do I want to live God's way or my way? It doesn't take long gazing at the world or ourselves to see what we chose.

Adam and Eve chose to do the garden their way, and in so doing, they created a desert wasteland for all humankind. The serpent Satan tempted them not to trust God, question God's motives, and believe they could create beauty and order apart from God. They gave in to the temptation. They thought they could go it alone, which is why we do too. They ate, and this happened:

> **(S12) Genesis 3:7** (ESV)
> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

When humanity chose self over God, it corrupted everything, and Adam and Eve, the first and best of humankind, felt naked shame. Now instead of loving God and loving each other, people curse God and hurt each other. Instead of living in complete trust, we felt fear and mistrust and acted in our own interests. When we take God's authority and use it for our own good instead of the good of all, we get naked shame.

Since then, politics have been marred by selfishness, by "us" vs. "them," and by trying to get my group ahead at the expense of others. The political wasteland has become, "Their side is evil, and my side is good." That's how we think. That side is the problem, the liberals, the conservatives! But doesn't the pain and evil of Genesis 3 run through all of us? One of my favorite authors, Skye Jethani, uses this illustration:

> Václav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic, was imprisoned for resisting the Communists in the 1970s and '80s. When he was released and elected president, Havel surprised many by being noticeably forgiving toward his political enemies. Some criticized him for this stance and misinterpreted it as weakness. But Havel reminded the Czech people that "the line between good and evil did not run clearly between 'them' and 'us,' but through each person."[7]

Human selfishness (my selfishness) *corrupted the good of politics*. I want to confess that the way I've thought about politics has been about me. My side is right, and their side is wrong. But doesn't the wrongness of Genesis 3 run through all of us? It's so easy to spot the evil on the other side of the political aisle, but that same fallenness runs through each of us.

A pastor-friend told me this joke. "A pastor was out for a walk and noticed one of his parishioners tending his garden. The pastor said to the man, 'That's a fine garden you and the Lord have together.' The man replied, 'Thank you, but you should have seen it when the Lord had it by himself.'"[8]

(S13) Politics are caught between flourishing and fallenness.

God created politics to help creation flourish, but when Adam and Eve sinned, politics lost their full potential for good and still fall short today. We see politics' fallenness when God cursed humankind:

> **(S14) Genesis 3:16** (ESV)
> To the woman he said,
>
> "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
> in pain you shall bring forth children.
> Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
> but he shall rule over you."

Instead of men and women planting trees in the desert together, men and women vie for power over each other. The fall distorts family, social relationships, and work, too, even political work. God curses man:

> **(S15) Genesis 3:17b-19** (ESV)
> 17 … cursed is the ground because of you;
> in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
> 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
> and you shall eat the plants of the field.
> 19 By the sweat of your face
> you shall eat bread,
> till you return to the ground,
> for out of it you were taken;
> for you are dust,
> and to dust you shall return."

All work, gardening, teaching, business, politics, no matter how inherently good, is corrupted and marred by sin. And yet, the goodness of work, even political work, remains in part. In Genesis 1, God gave government and politics to humanity to benefit all creation. But by Genesis 3, humanity misused that authority and politics fell. *Now, politics are caught between flourishing and fallenness.*

(S16) Monica created a garden from scratch this summer.[9] We had this little plot of dirt where barely anything grew. It was almost desert-like, but she envisioned a flourishing garden there. So she laid down a base, built a cinder-block wall, formed a wire-mesh cover, and installed a greenhouse tarp. That land used to give us dirt and weeds, and now we get kale, swiss chard, radishes, peas, beets, carrots, and basil. Basil! But it has been challenging. Critters have gotten into the garden and eaten the plants. Bugs and some sort of fungus is growing on our tomato bush, so I try not to eat very much from it. This summer was rainy, but other summers have been dry. We envision a fertile abundant, fruitful garden, and in many ways, it has produced, but our garden has also fallen short of what it could be. That's our world—that's politics.

Politics live somewhere between what is and what ought to be. We can hope for the best yet be realistic about our expectations. It can be very good to vote, run for office, and work as a public servant, but at the same time, we have to guard our hearts against putting too much faith in what they can accomplish. If you notice your heart getting overwhelmed with politics, take a step back

and remember Genesis 1-3. The world gets angry and worked up over politics because that's the hope they have, but that's not us.

Believers should strive for justice and change but also expect setbacks and difficulties. Until Christ's return and final restoration, Christians can participate in politics neither crippled by fear or overly expectant of what they can accomplish but hopeful and confident that God can and will work through them however he chooses. *Politics are caught between flourishing and fallenness*. But here's our ultimate hope:

(S17) Jesus can redeem all things, even politics, for good.

We don't just live between Genesis 1 and Genesis 3. We live after Acts, after the events of the New Testament when Christ came to transform our fallenness into flourishing. God promised he would do this all along. Just before God cursed Adam and Eve, God cursed the serpent by telling him about a garden rescuer:

> **(S18) Genesis 3:15** (ESV)
> I will put enmity between you and the woman,
> and between your offspring and her offspring;
> he shall bruise your head,
> and you shall bruise his heel."

God promises to send one of Eve's offspring, one of her great-great-grandchildren, to defeat the serpent and restore what Adam and Eve lost. The garden rescuer will restore the paradise through his own bruising, suffering, and death. That's what happened to Jesus. Although he was innocent, he suffered and died to rescue Adam and Eve and all of creation. But then God raised him from the dead. Mary Magdalene was the first person to see him. Do you know who she mistook him for? A gardener (John 20:15). Jesus is our garden rescuer, come to restore flourishing to the desert, and he wants to do that good work with us.

True and ultimate flourishing is only possible through a relationship with God, which comes by believing in and partnering with Jesus Christ. It's challenging to do a teaching series on *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* because politics, apart from God, can only take you so far. God calls us to seek the good of our communities and work towards the world's flourishing, both through healthy civic engagement and by sharing the message of Christ's death and resurrection with those around us.

That doesn't mean we should try to force God back into politics, but rather, walk with God in the garden, till the soil, seek the flourishing of all creation. This is the question this sermon series is trying to answer. How do we do that? How do we garden our world with Jesus? How do we transform a desert into a flourishing garden, even when it's challenging, complicated, and hard?

(S19) I was listening to another pastor preach on politics, and he reminded me of someone I knew but had slipped my mind, William Wilberforce.[10] I read his book, *Real Christianity,* many years ago, which he wrote to help end the slave trade in England.[11] Wilberforce was elected to the House of Commons in 1780 and became an evangelical Christian several years later.[12] His childhood pastor and mentor as an adult was John Newton, a onetime slaver who came to Christ and wrote the song *Amazing Grace*.

Wilberforce founded the "Anti-Slavery Society" in 1787 and introduced legislation time and time again to end slavery. He was planting trees in the desert, watering them, seeing growth, then the wind came and blew down his progress. He was living between the flourishing and fallenness of Genesis 1 and Genesis 3, and I imagine he was praying that the garden rescuer would come and redeem his broken world for the good of the enslaved and the good of England.

It wasn't until 1807 that slavery ended, but even then, only for new slaves, not those still caught in slavery. It wasn't until 1833 that the Slavery Abolition Act passed. William Wilberforce died three days later. It had been 46 years since Wilberforce started working to end slavery in England. It takes work to turn a desert into an oasis, but with Christ, all things are possible. **(S20)** *Jesus can redeem all things, even politics, for good.*

> *Benediction* - **Numbers 6:24-26** (ESV)
> 24 The Lord bless you and keep you;
> 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
> 26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my first sermon from my *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *A Vision of Flourishing*. Next Sunday, I'm looking forward to our first follow-up teaching and discussion during our 8:30 to 9:30 AM adult Christian education hour on Zoom or in the church sanctuary. I hope you can join us. Until then, I have three spiritual exercises for all who want to dive deeper into this series:

1. **Reflect**: Take time to journal and reflect on your understanding of faith and politics. How does the Bible inform your view of politics? Where does the biblical concept of "flourishing," "shalom," and "the common good" fit into your political ideas? Is this new or not new? If so, how do you feel about it? What excites you about this teaching or makes you nervous?

2. **Listen**: Listen to *Lecture on the Early Church & Politics* by Tim Mackie of *The Bible Project* (92 minutes - August 15, 2017). YouTube: https://youtu.be/wXcSJVW8rg4. While we will not review this sermon directly in our Christian Education hour, we will discuss many of the same ideas and concepts Mackie presents, enriching our understanding and our follow-up conversation. This message is, perhaps, the best sermon I have ever heard on faith and politics.

3. **Pray**: Take time to pray for the flourishing of your town, our state, our nation, and the world. Ask God to help you seek the flourishing of each as he gives you the opportunity. Pray that he would help you become an instrument of his flourishing wherever he has you.

Thank you, and may God bless you with a vision of the kind of flourishing only he can bring.

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*I did not add this second paragraph until my third sermon, "Love God & Neighbor."

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1. New China TV, "Desert turns into oasis: Man plants 50,000 trees in 15 years in N China," YouTube, published August 29, 2017, accessed September 27, 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YM2SZ8NS8EM.

2. According to Google, 1 hectare equals about 2.471 acres, so 67 hectares equals about 165 acres.

3. Keith Giles, *Jesus Untangled: Crucifying Our Politics to Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2017) 19, Kindle.

4. Robert Barron, *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020.) 197. Kindle.

5. *Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger III and William D. Mounce, Accordance Bible Software, s.v. "פ," paragraph 14541, https://accordance.bible/link/read/KM_Hebrew_Dictionary#14541.

6. "Crawford Notch History" Parks & Recreation New Hampshire, https://www.nhstateparks.org/getmedia/cb5e412f-8c0a-45b8-b0ff-362cea4e52e7/Crawford-Notch-History-and-the-Willey-Family-Story.pdf. All notes on this from here.

7. Václav Havel quoted in Timothy Garton Ash, "The Truth about Dictatorship," New York Times Review of Books, February 19, 1998, 36–37, quoted in Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the Way you Relate to God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011) 43, 197, Kindle.

8. Thank you Pastor Alex Burgess for telling me this joke on 9/28/21 at Bradford Christian Academy.

9. Tim Mackie uses a similar illustration in his sermon on politics. See Spiritual Exercises for sermon.

10. "The Controversial Jesus - Jesus and Politics - Jon Tyson," YouTube, published May 28, 2018, accessed October 2, 2021 https://youtu.be/1En37ldKvlU.

11. See book description on Amazon.

12. Britannica, T., Editors of Encyclopedia, "William Wilberforce," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 20, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Wilberforce. All Wilberforce facts from this site.

#1 Sermon Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3

Slide 4

Slide 5

God created politics to help creation flourish.

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Slide 6

God created politics to help creation flourish.

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV)
26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

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Slide 7

God created politics to help creation flourish.
Genesis 1:28 (ESV)
28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
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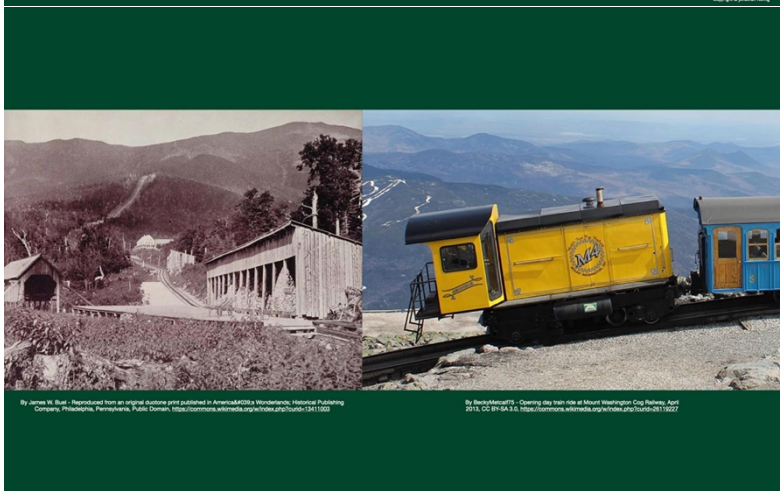
Slide 8

Slide 9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Slide 10

Slide 11

Human selfishness corrupted the good of politics.

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Slide 12

Human selfishness corrupted the good of politics.

Genesis 3:7 (ESV)
Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

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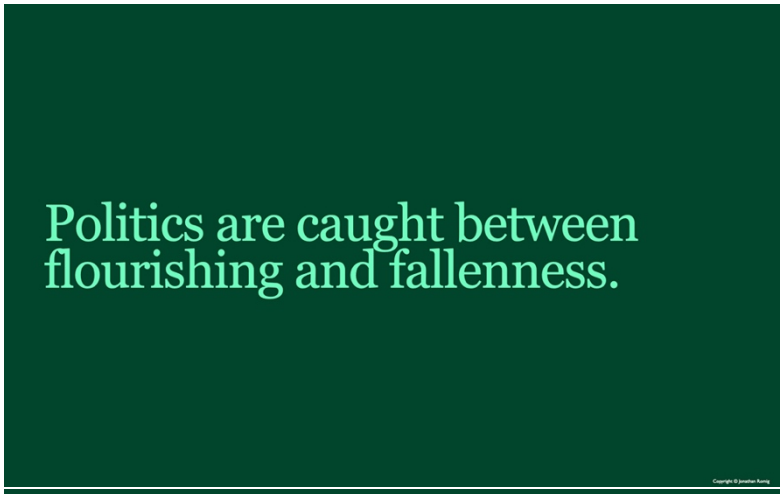

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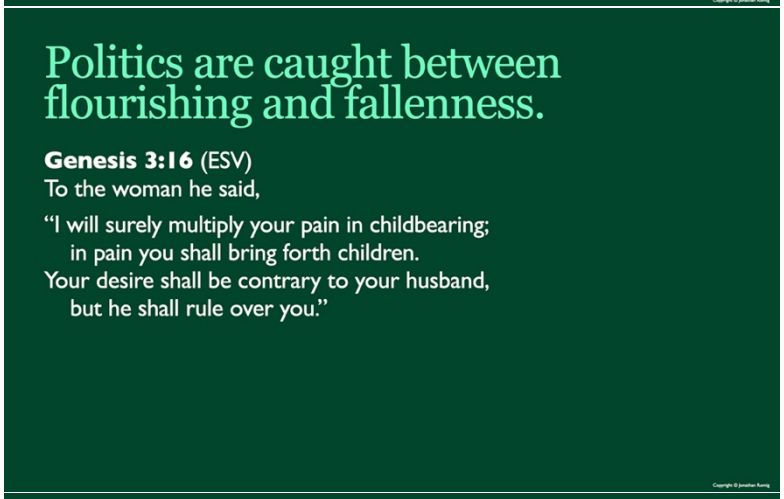
Politics are caught between flourishing and fallenness.
Genesis 3:16 (ESV)
To the woman he said,
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you."
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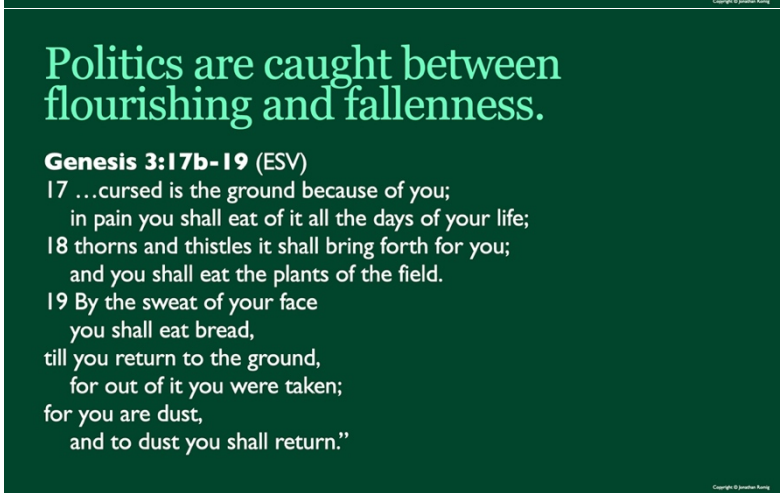
Slide 15


Politics are caught between flourishing and fallenness.
Genesis 3:17b-19 (ESV)
17 …cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."
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Slide 17

Jesus can redeem all things, even politics, for good.

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Slide 18

Jesus can redeem all things, even politics, for good.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

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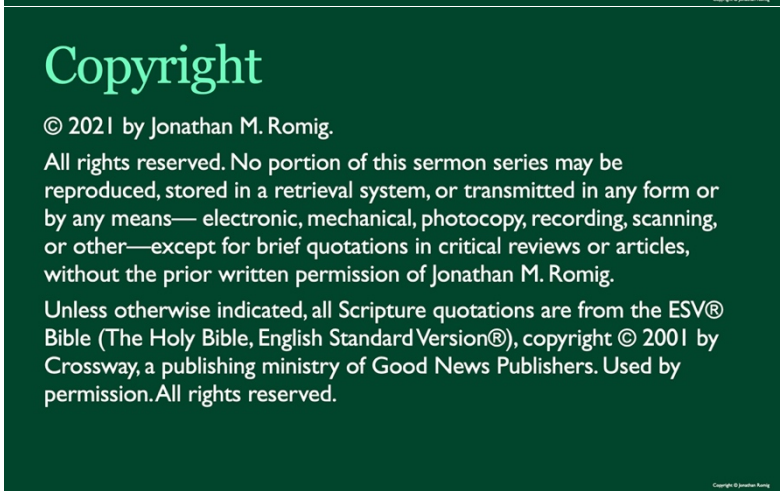
Slide 19

Slide 20

Slide 21*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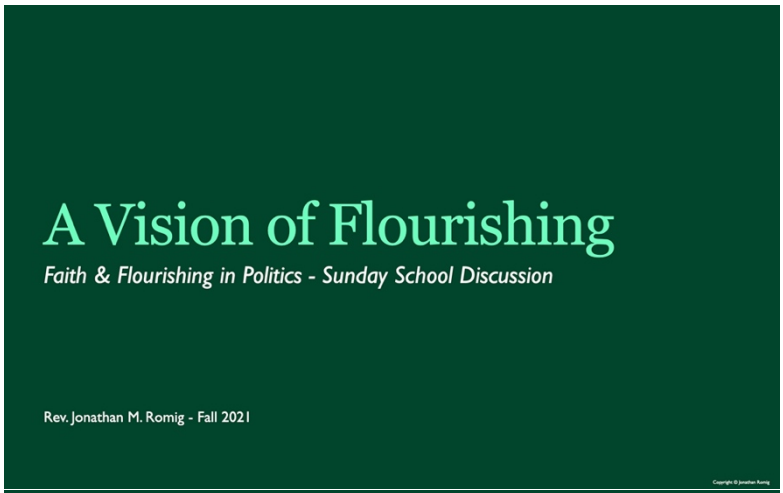
*I uploaded various versions of the final slide with the website's slides, but did not project in the church service. I will include this same slide once more since I updated it in the sermon.

#1 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1



Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

Slide 3

Genesis 1:26-28
26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (ESV)

Slide 4

Photo by Jonathan Romig of the Westford Community Garden.

Image by varno0491 from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/boston-skyline-coast-summer-3690818/

What is flourishing and why should we care about it?

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Slide 5

Common grace is a doctrine that gives us a vision for seeing one vital part of Christian faithfulness. While it is vitally important to proclaim the gospel, introduce people to Jesus, and help them move toward faithful discipleship as they participate in church life, it is also tremendously important for Christians to see that it has always been our responsibility to care for the world, cultivating the flourishing of life through our activity in culture, politics, education, medicine, business, and every public area.

Vincent E. Bacote, *The Political Disciple: A Theology of Public Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) 30, Kindle.

*Common grace is God's general goodness to all life versus saving grace is God's special revelation through Jesus.

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Slide 6

"When God charged humans to fill and subdue the earth, he granted humanity a profound authority. That authority includes the capacity to do politics. What did God intend politics for? … politics is for flourishing, also described in Scripture as shalom. … In a flourishing community, the image of God is honored in each person, families and other institutions thrive, the vulnerable are protected, the stranger is welcomed, the oppressed are liberated, and everyone enjoys peace and security."

Political Discipleship: A Group Study for Christian Citizenship, Participant Guide, published by *The Center for Public Justice* (p. 6)

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Slide 7

Genesis 3:16b, 17b-19

16 … "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you."

17 … cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

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Slide 8

Image by klimkin from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/flower-life-yellow-flower-crack-887443/

Why is flourishing so difficult to achieve through politics?

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Slide 9

"How am I fighting for a more flourishing, just, community and not just for the things that help me or the things that are good for me? … Like everything else in our life, our engagement in politics is not about us. It's about the common good, it's about the glory of God, it's about our witness, but we don't do that very well."

Kaitlyn Schiess, *Holy Post Podcast, Episode 473*

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Slide 10

"We discover flourishing through the living of it." Flourishing can be "hazy" from afar, yet "becomes clear" as work towards it.

Yale Center for Faith & Culture, Professor Katie Grimes Interview (paraphrase)

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Slide 11

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you
and the woman,
and between your
offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

Image by 547764 from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/foot-baby-mother-new-creation-508723/

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Slide 12

Image by Reijo Telaranta from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/flower-life-yellow-flower-crack-887443/

How can the gospel help cultivate flourishing?

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Slide 13

If we are centered on the gospel, then that means that our mission is to expose sin with the light of Christ. Sin is not neatly marked out in silos marked "personal" and "social." The Bible shows us from the beginning that the scope of the curse is holistic in its destruction—personal, cosmic, social, vocational (Gen. 3–11), and the Bible shows us in the end that the gospel is holistic in its restoration—personal, cosmic, social, vocational (Rev. 21–22).

Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 5, Kindle.

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Slide 14

We are working on earth with the knowledge that every true work of human flourishing, done in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a preview of the day that God's good creation is redeemed.

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 177, Kindle.

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Slide 15

Image by Bruce Emmerling from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/sculpture-prayer-hands-religion-3611519/

Let's pray for our town, state, nation, and world's flourishing.

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Matthew 5-7

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Faith, Not Fear

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / October 10th, 2021

(S1) Did you know that deep in the recesses of our brain is a grape-sized cluster of cells called the amygdala? Our amygdala is a little like the emergency response center of our brain. It is constantly searching for danger, and when it identifies it, it sounds the alarm. Our blood pressure rises, our heartbeat goes up, we go on high alert and get ready for action. The amygdala "activates the fight-or-flight response."[1]

Turn a corner and find a snarling dog; your amygdala will send you sprinting in the other direction, or you might start throwing rocks, fight, or flight. That's good! Your amygdala can save your life. Some people call our amygdala our lizard brain.[2] When threatened, we become as speedy as lizards and as thoughtful as lizards, not very smart. The amygdala wants to get you away from the threat, not think through all your best options. Sometimes politics activates our amygdala, which makes us afraid.

During the 2016 Presidential Primary, about 50% of each political party said the other political party made them feel afraid.[3] Politicians on both sides of the aisle use our lizard brains against us. **(S2)** One 2016 primary candidate on the right said, "It was only a matter of time before the federal government started using chisels to 'remove the crosses and the Stars of David from the tombstones of our fallen soldiers.'"[4] On the left, it was so bad it was funny. **(S3)** In a 2011 ad, a man dressed in a suit pushed his grandmother up a hill. *America the Beautiful* played as the video says Republicans want to abolish Medicare. **(S4)** And then, at the end, the man dumps his grandma, a manikin, off the side of a cliff.[5] Both parties use immigration, abortion, taxes, healthcare, gun laws, gay rights, and more to stroke our lizard brains. Fear is the "elephant" in the room (or should I say "donkey"?). So here's my question:

(S5) How is fear shaping us?

How has fear shaped the way we engage with the world? Has our amygdala influenced our relationships with loved ones, jobs, quality of life, and politics? If Jesus can redeem all things, even politics, for good, then he can certainly redeem my lizard brain. He can break through the fog of fear with the sunshine of faith. This ties into our first sermon because fear limits us from seeing what God desires. Fear blinds us to the vision of flourishing God calls Christians to cultivate in our world.

More goes into flourishing than just "don't be afraid," which is why I've tried to summarize the most important concepts and commands that help us cultivate flourishing with the word "flourish." We're going to use it as an acronym to help us remember how to seek flourishing. You might have already guessed what the "F" stands for by our sermon title, "Faith, Not Fear." This command comes from Jesus.

Did you know Jesus once preached a "political manifesto"[6] where he explained his followers don't have to be afraid? Before he gets there, Jesus begins his political manifesto at the Sermon on the Mount this way:

> **(S6) Matthew 5:3** (ESV)
> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Kingdom of heaven" is political language, the start of a political manifesto. With his very first words, Jesus begins to rewire how we think about our world. The poor in spirit aren't the lowest of society. The homeless and oppressed, and spiritually weak aren't cursed but blessed because God's kingdom belongs to them. They have nothing to fear. Jesus kingdom, Jesus' politics, flip the world's expectations upside-down.

(S7) Jesus' kingdom is one of faith, not fear.

It's not the rich and powerful and those who dominate in politics who are secure, but the least of these. The kingdoms of this world operate on fear and power, but God's kingdom operates in faith and weakness. Towards the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages faith, not fear:

> **(S8) Matthew 6:28-30** (ESV)
> 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

What a weird political manifesto! Jesus knows his followers are anxious, worried, and stressed about what they eat, drink and wear. They were anxious about their jobs and food supply, both political issues. And for some of them, this anxiety consumed them. But Jesus wants to expand their vision, to help them see the goodness God has for them. How do they see that?

(S9) Flowers! Flowers! Wildflowers grow without any help, and they look amazing. Look at these purple and blue "forget me not" flowers. Even perhaps the most successful politician in the whole Old Testament, King Solomon, who built the temple and established Israel as a global superpower during his reign, even he isn't as glorious as these flowers. And if flowers sprout one day and die the next, and God takes care of them, how much more will God take care of you and me? If God can cause flowers to flourish, he can take care of our flourishing too. *Jesus' kingdom is one of faith, not fear*.

(S10) Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence.

I believe Christ doesn't call believers to a posture of fear but a posture of faith. We find this call to faith in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, his political manifesto. First, Jesus challenges his believers to have greater faith, "O you of little faith," and then he adds a positive exhortation of how we are to live:

(S11) Matthew 6:33 (ESV)
But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

In other words, don't worry about your own flourishing, but live for Christ and his kingdom and his way of living envisioned in Matthew 5-7, and Jesus will take care of you. That's challenging because it's so easy to prioritize our fears instead of Christ and his kingdom. But we as Christians can walk by faith by taking a posture one author identifies as "faithful presence."[7] Being faithful to Jesus and present wherever he has us.

1. **(S12) Faithful Presence**

To be "faithful" is to trust and obey Jesus' teachings, the teachings found in Matthew 5-7, and the whole Scripture. That means Christians need to hold fast to the message that Jesus died and rose again and is both Savior of my soul and Lord of all of life, of my family, my career, my sexuality, my finances, my everything. But to be "faithful" and "present" is to live out our faith wherever God has placed us, in whatever setting or context, among our family members, at our jobs, in the public square (aka. politics). I have a fellow church-planting friend who I just talked with this week who is a pastor and is also running for city council. He tries to follow Jesus both in the church and public service and is trusting God to lead the way.

The idea of faithful presence is throughout the Sermon on the Mount, which is why I am contrasting it with where fear normally leads—fight, flight, or fusion, none of which express faith in God.

2. **(S13) Fight**

When our lizard brains are activated, we sometimes fight back, but Jesus says not to fight back:

(S14) Matthew 5:38-39 (ESV)
"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Jesus does not want his followers to fight their enemies, but to love them, to turn the other cheek. Not only is Jesus talking about physical violence, but insults as well. If you are right-handed, and you slap someone on their right cheek, you are giving them a back-handed slap, which stings not only their cheek but also their pride. Have you ever had anyone insult or attack your political beliefs? Jesus says to turn the cheek, to stay present and engaged even though it hurts.

But a fighting posture doesn't do that. A fight posture tries to overcome its opponents and to protect itself. In politics, this often looks like vilification of the other political party and their leaders and advocating for laws that protect my group at the cost of others. Fear doesn't help us love our neighbors and seek their good.

I've taken the "fight" approach to political engagement. When I arrived at college, I was ready to "do battle" with the liberals. There was truth in the things I said, but the manner in which I engaged was combative. I swore at one of my classmates for criticizing the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. **Faithful presence** wouldn't have reacted by fighting back but would try to ask

questions to understand. Then maybe faithful presence would study Scripture to see how the Bible encourages freedom and liberty yet critiques the use of war and violence. That would be messy and difficult; faithful presence always is. At the end of my college career, I was having lunch with a classmate who snapped at me for my political views and told me they needed to be defeated. I've taken the posture of fight, and I've felt what it's like to be on the receiving end, and it doesn't feel good. *Fear leads to fighting, not flourishing, but faithful presence is different.* Fear also leads to:

3. **(S15) Flight**

What's another reaction to fear? Flight. Flight is when we withdraw from politics or culture or our neighbors because they are too risky and might corrupt us. We isolate to preserve our beliefs, group, and identity. Jesus' teachings are supposed to make us distinct from those around us but not to separate us. The type of distinction Jesus envisioned was one of flavor, of enriching the world. In his manifesto, he said this:

> **(S16) Matthew 5:13** (ESV)
> "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

Salt is not good on its own. Ever tried to eat a spoonful of salt? Did you know a spoonful of salt could kill you? A young man drank a bottle of soy sauce, and it almost killed him. He passed out, and his friends took him to the emergency room, where they flushed his system. He was in a coma for three days.[8]

Salt is best when it's mixed with other foods, like scrambled eggs. Scrambled eggs without salt are tasteless, but they're perfect with salt, cheese, and a little milk. Oh, so good! Salt brings out the flavor. Salt preserves food from going bad.[9] That's what we as Christians are supposed to do, to bring out our world's flavor, and work to keep the world good. But instead, we've often retreated into safe Christian subcultures, into churches, into private schools and colleges, made our own record labels and publishing companies. In high school, my youth group, which was mostly Christians, attended a Christian conference where they were raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a Christian Facebook. That feels like flight to me. Faithful presence is being on Facebook and engaging with truth and compassion. *Fear doesn't lead to flourishing but to fighting back or fleeing from.* Fear also leads to:

4. **(S17) Fusion**

Fusion is when we become so afraid of our culture or peers that we give up our beliefs and identity and do what the world does. It's running into a barking dog and not fighting or fleeing, but curling up into a ball and hoping the dog goes away. We give up what makes us distinctive and assimilate into whoever is pressuring us, on the left or right. But this is not Jesus' way. Jesus calls us to be "salt" and "light" in our culture.

> **(S18) Matthew 5:14, 16** (ESV)
> 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. […] 16 In the

> same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus was addressing his followers, the people who would become the church. He wanted them to stand out in the world, not blend in. This is hard because we are at the greatest risk of fusion when our friends and peers and the political party we like affirm something wrong. This is one reason we should be careful not to identify any one political party as the "Christian party."[10] When we do so, the church loses its place as a light to the world, as "a city set on a hill." That title belongs to the church and the church alone. When the church is faithful to Jesus yet present in the world, not corrupted by partisanship or cultural pressures, it can be a shining city set on a hill. *Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence*.

(S19) Faith in Jesus makes faithful presence possible.

This comes down to one question. Who do you trust? Who do you believe? Do you believe in Jesus and trust him enough that if you seek his kingdom and his righteousness and don't run away, or fight back, that all these things will be added to you? That he will take care of you and work through you to make a difference?

Jesus practiced faithful presence. He didn't fight back as the rulers wrongly accused him. He didn't flee when he was hanging on the cross. He didn't fuse with the culture or even what his disciples expected. They didn't want him to go to the cross, but he did. Instead, Jesus was faithful to his Father and present wherever his Father led him, and it changed the world. Jesus preached a political manifesto that threatened the powers of the rulers and authorities, and that's why they crucified him. But because of the faithful presence of Jesus, because of his obedience and ministry, we can have eternal life and experience true and eternal flourishing.

If you are someone who struggles with fear, fear in politics, fear in anything, ask Jesus to come and cast out that fear so that you can be faithful and present wherever God calls you. I want to close by sharing a personal story because not succumbing to fear in politics is incredibly difficult. I'm learning what it means to be faithful and present in my political engagement, yet I have not arrived.

I served on one of our town's committees for about ten months and found it very challenging, and I wrestled with a lot of anxiety. In one meeting in-particular, I thought one of our committee members was proposing we vote our support for a bill I thought wasn't good for churches or any faith group, not just Christians, but Muslims too. We'll call that legislation the National bill.

I was taking the minutes when I thought I heard a team member propose we vote to affirm the National bill as a committee. I became so nervous that I recorded what I thought I'd heard, the National bill, when he proposed we support a local Beacon Hill bill, which was very different. At the end of the meeting, I summed up what I thought I'd heard, the proposal for the National bill. I gave it that name. I spent the next week thinking about how I was going to have to raise some concerns at the next meeting about our supporting the National bill, and it made me very nervous. I did research and prayed a lot about it.

When I finally reviewed the video of our meeting minutes to finalize them for our next meeting, I realized my fellow committee member had not proposed the National bill but the Beacon Hill

bill. But it was too late because even though I tried to clarify, our subcommittee started calling the local Beacon Hill bill by the name of the big National bill, and the name stuck.

I let my lizard brain control me. Fear shaped what I heard and how I responded, and I accidentally introduced the very thing I didn't want. That's what fear does! Fear can't produce flourishing, only fight or flight, or in my case, confusion. I was willing to be faithful, but because I was fearful, it hindered me from being present when I needed to be. That's what fear does. It hinders flourishing.

A couple of weeks later, the Lord gave me the chance to speak up about this same issue a different way. Another group I care about published a statement opposing the National Bill in a way I thought was aggressive and unfair to the bill itself. While I agreed the National Bill was very unhelpful, I thought their statement was counterproductive. I told them why I didn't think their statement was helpful and tried to propose a different way that emphasized the common good. This led to a fruitful conversation where I learned some things I didn't know, and I felt heard. I felt like that was closer to faithful presence.

Taking a posture of faithful presence is difficult. I tried to do it on both sides, not fusing but also not fighting back. However, faithful presence does mean being present, which I can say is no longer the case for me as I stepped off the town committee. But as the Spirit leads me elsewhere, I hope to be faithful and present when given the opportunity, and I hope you will as well. *How should we engage in politics? With faith, not fear. Faith in Jesus makes faithful presence possible.*

> *Benediction* - **1 John 4:18-19** (ESV)
> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my second sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series—*Faith, Not Fear*. Next Sunday, I'm looking forward to our additional teaching and discussion during our 9:00 to 10:00 AM (New Time!) adult Christian education hour on Zoom or in the church sanctuary. I hope you can join us. Like last week, here are several follow-up spiritual exercises for all who want to dive deeper into this series:

4. **Observe**: What's the usual way you watch or listen to the news? TV? Internet? Podcast? This time when you listen, practice identifying any usage of fear to engage the audience. Be mindful of your heart and emotions. Does what is being communicated cause you to feel anxiety or stress? Read Matthew 5-7 and make a note of all the ways the passage encourages believers to live by faith.

5. **Listen (sermon)**: Listen to God, *Politics, and the Church: Resisting the Politics of Fear* by Pastor Rich Villodas of New Life Fellowship Church New York City (47 minutes – October 25, 2020). YouTube: https://youtu.be/9y5HH0DGnKo This sermon also tackles the problem of fear in politics and is worth listening to as we consider how to engage by faith, not fear, in our world.

6. **Read (beginner)**: Read the short but memorable digital book *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* by Skye Jethani (2016; 64 pages). Jethani creates an allegory for the ways believers have historically engaged in politics: fight and flight, and proposes an alternative, faithfulness leading to flourishing.

7. **Read (advanced)**: For those who want a much more in-depth review of this sermon's fourfold paradigm and the history of those who have engaged this way, please read *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* by James Davidson Hunter (2010; 368 pages). We have one copy available in our Cornerstone church library.

8. **Pray**: Take time to pray that you and your family would engage in the world with faith instead of fear. Identify the fears you have been operating under and confess them to the Lord. Ask him to lift the burden of your worries off you so you can practice faithful presence and seek the flourishing of those around you.

Thank you, and may you sense the faithful presence of Jesus Christ in your life.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. If you missed last week's follow-up sermon by Tim Mackie, here's a link.

1. “Amygdala Hijack: When Emotion Takes Over” healthline, published September 17, 2021, accessed October 4, 2021 https://www.healthline.com/health/stress/amygdala-hijack#takeaway.

2. Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 50-53, Kindle. Steinke talks a lot about the amygdala and lizards, which is where I got my basic info for this portion of my sermon.

3. “Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016,” Pew Research Center, published June 22, 2016, accessed October 4, 2021 https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/.

4. John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018) 37, Kindle.

5. “Granny Off the Cliff” TheAgendaProject, YouTube, published May 17, 2011, accessed October 4, 2021 https://youtu.be/OGnE83A1Z4U.

6. Tim Mackie, *Lecture on the Early Church & Politics*, YouTube, Tim Mackie Archives, published August 15, 2017, accessed September 27, 2021 https://youtu.be/wXcSJVW8rg4.

7. James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 272, Kindle.

8. Tia Ghose, “Man dared to drink quart of soy sauce almost dies from salt poisoning,” published June 7, 2013, accessed September 28, 2021 https://www.cbsnews.com/news/man-dared-to-drink-quart-of-soy-sauce-almost-dies-from-salt-poisoning/**.**

9. “Tim Keller | What a Minor Prophet Teaches Us About Nationalism and Race, Grace, and Mission,” YouTube, published April 3, 2019, accessed October 9, 2021, https://youtu.be/Uj8j03TadOg.

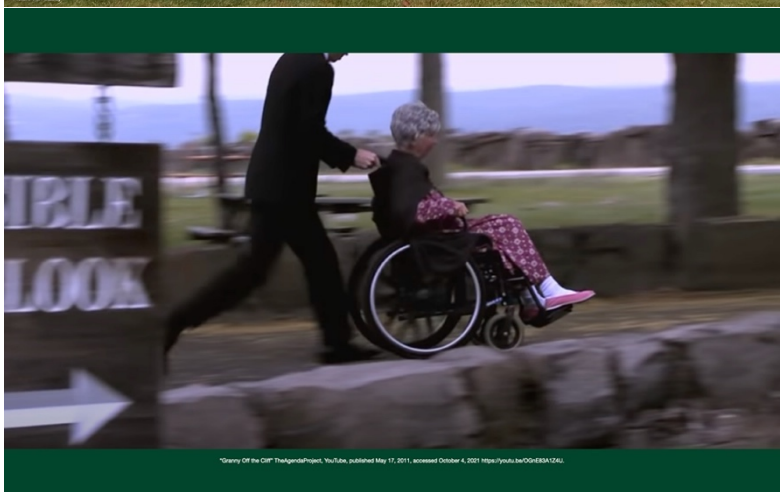
10. Timothy Keller, *How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don’t*, The New York Times, September 29, 2018, accessed October 4, 2021 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/29/opinion/sunday/christians-politics-belief.html.

#2 Sermon Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3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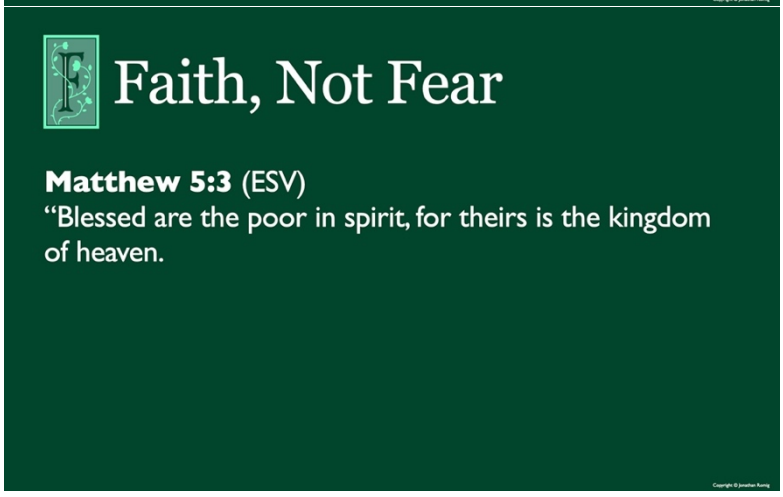

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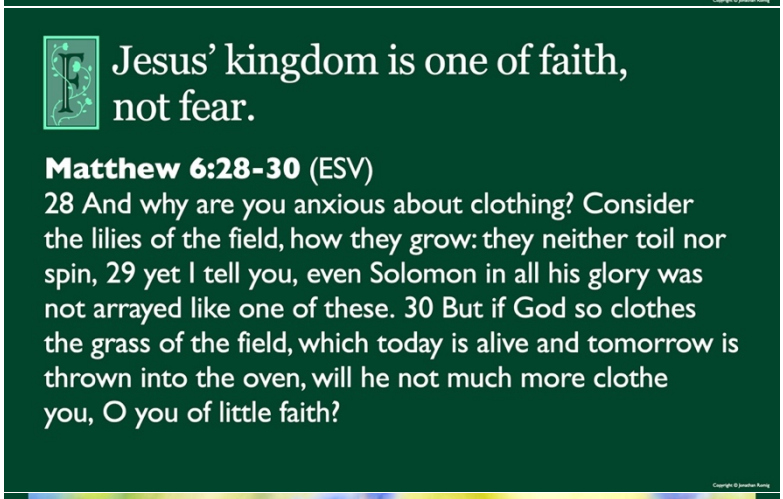
Jesus' kingdom is one of faith,
not fear.
Matthew 6:28-30 (ESV)
28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider
the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor
spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was
not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes
the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is
thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe
you, O you of little faith?

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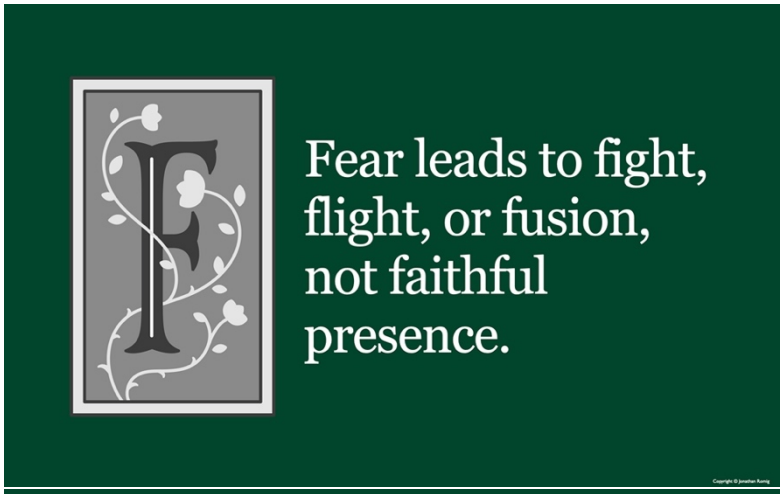

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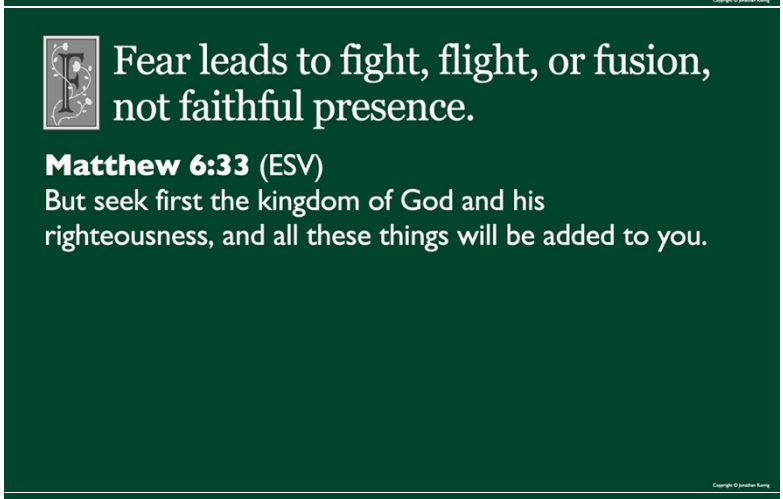
Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence.
Matthew 6:33 (ESV)
But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

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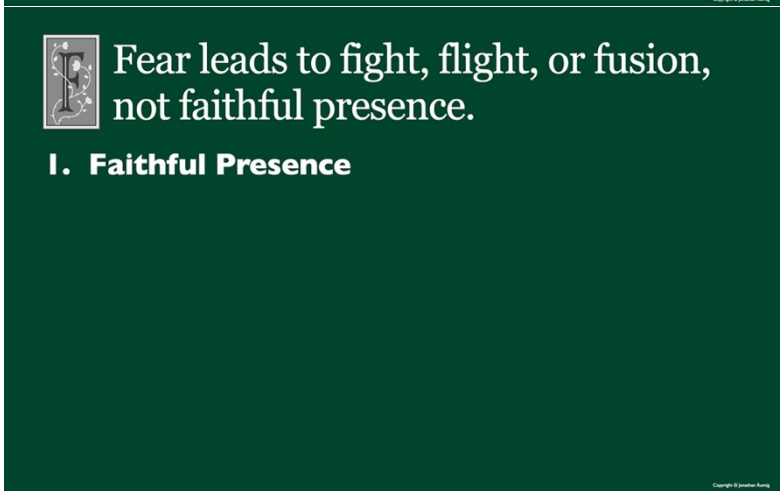

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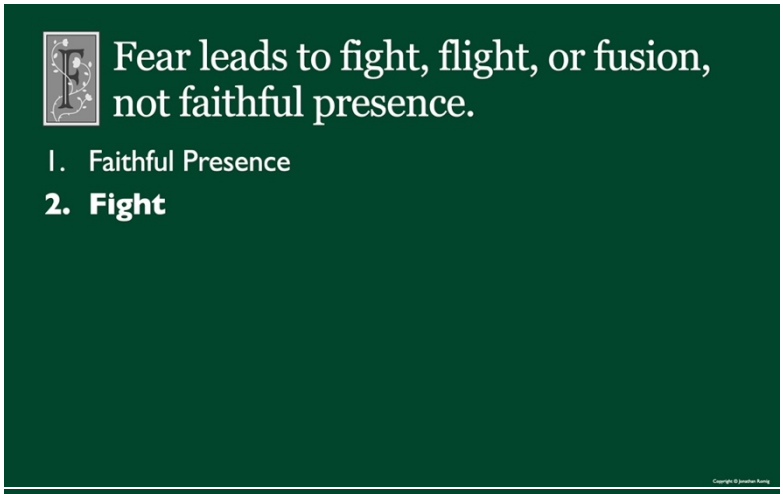

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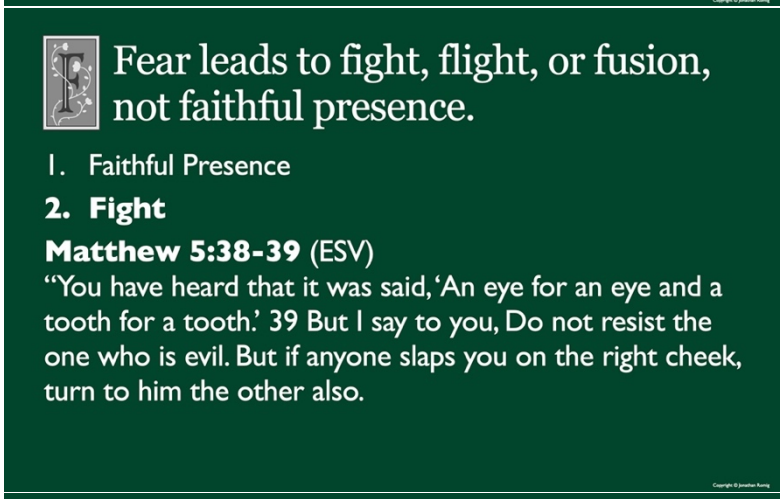
Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence.
1. Faithful Presence
2. Fight
Matthew 5:38-39 (ESV)
"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

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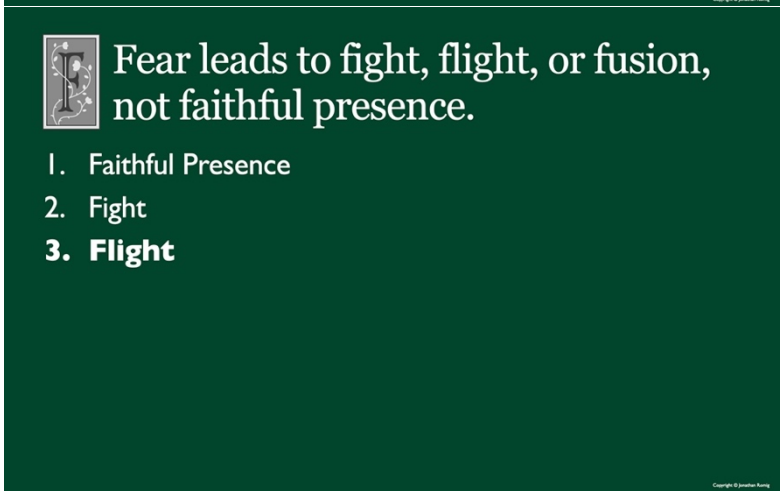

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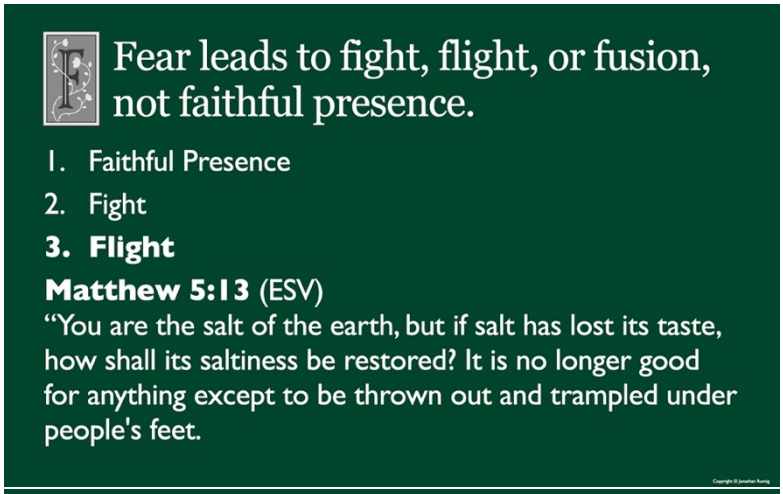
Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence.
1. Faithful Presence
2. Fight
3. Flight
Matthew 5:13 (ESV)
"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

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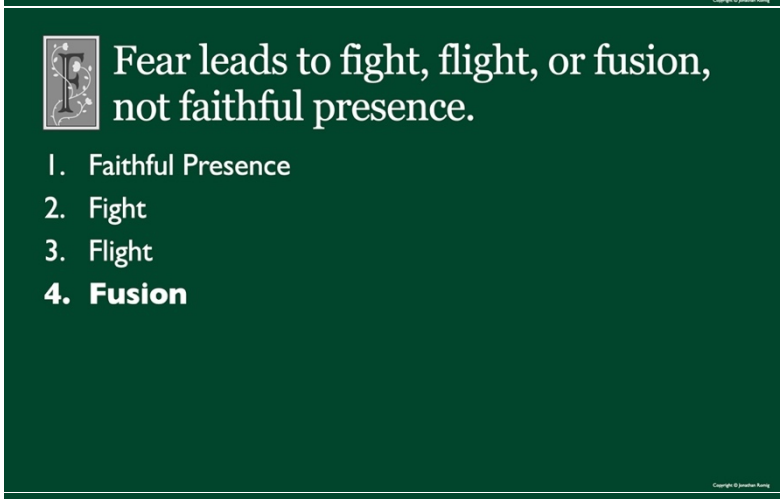

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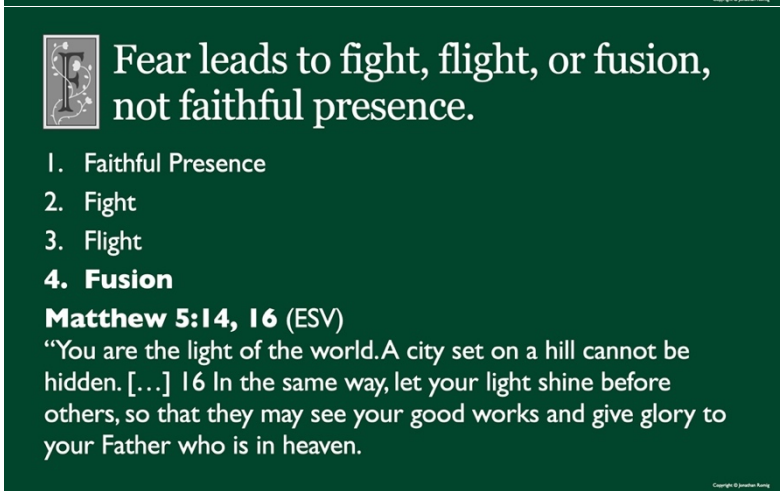
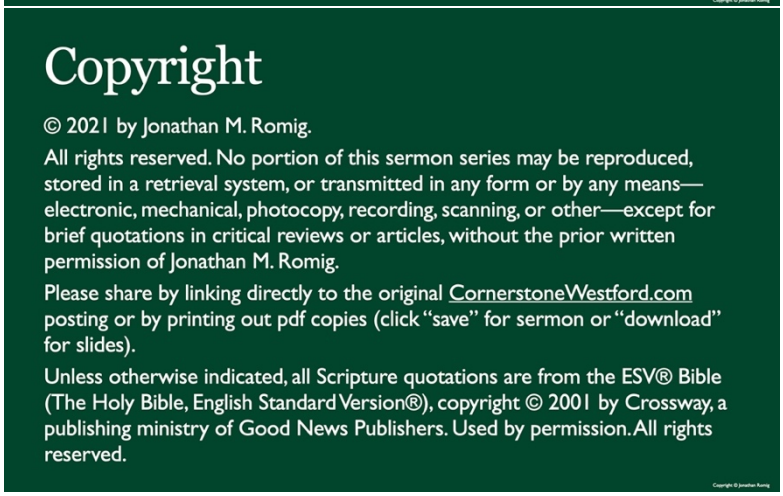

Fear leads to fight, flight, or fusion, not faithful presence.
1. Faithful Presence
2. Fight
3. Flight
4. Fusion
Matthew 5:14, 16 (ESV)
"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. […] 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Slide 19

Slide 20*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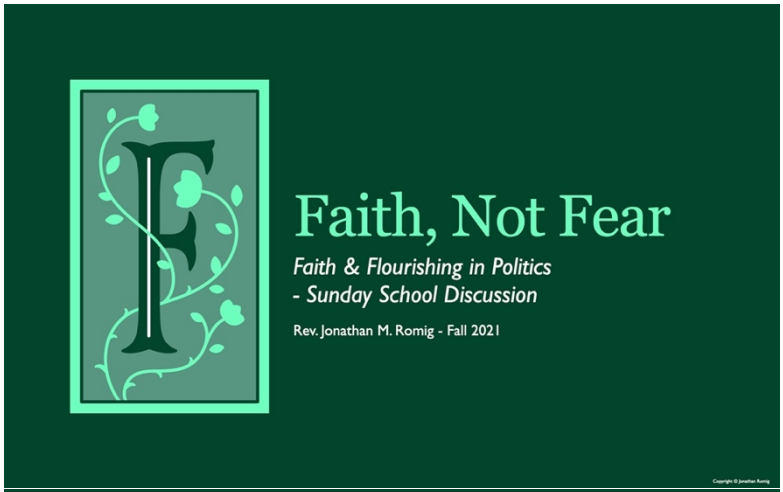
*Slightly updated slide from first sermon. As previously noted, I will not include this anymore in my slide presentations even though I posted it to the website.

#2 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1



Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

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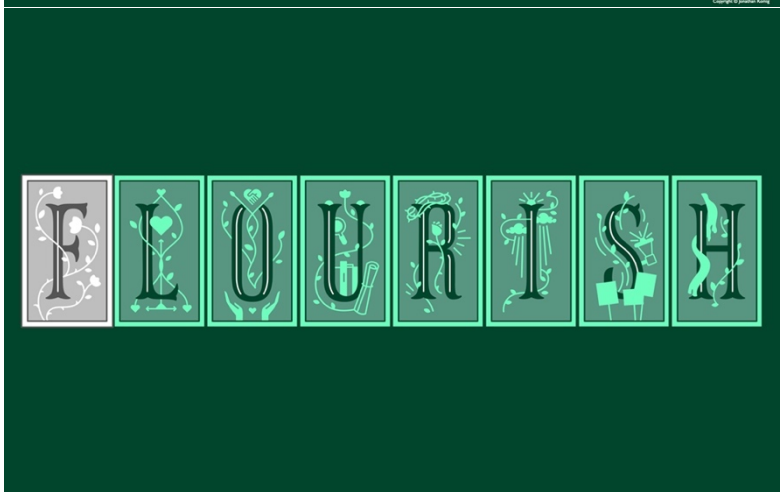

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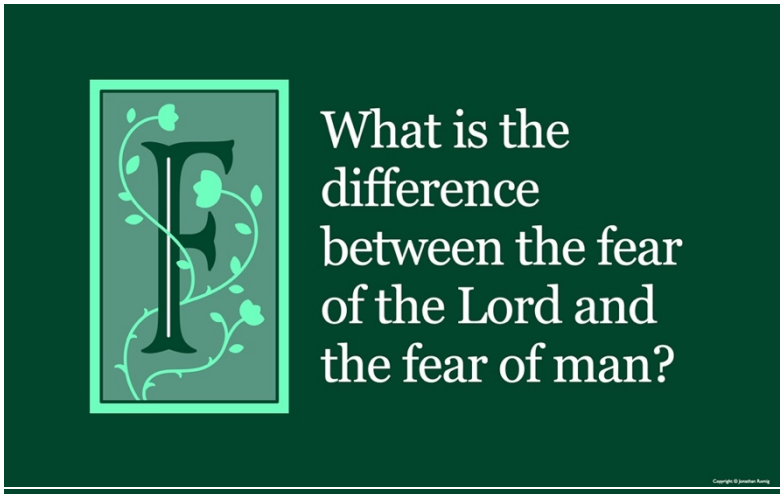

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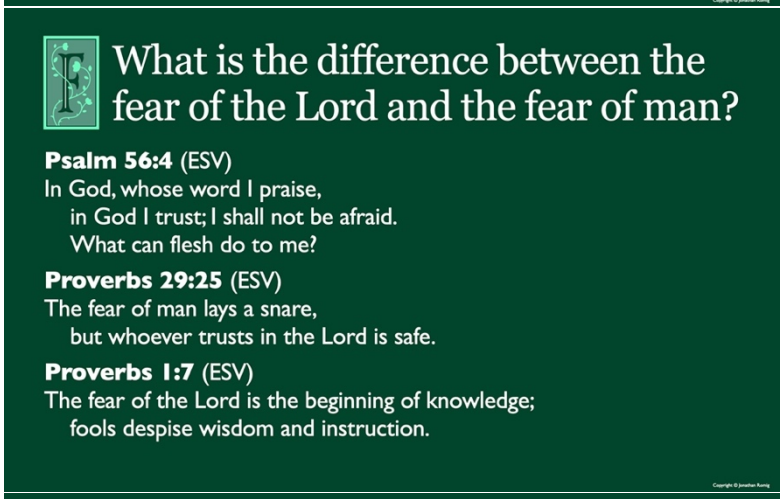
What is the difference between the fear of the Lord and the fear of man?
Psalm 56:4 (ESV)
In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can flesh do to me?
Proverbs 29:25 (ESV)
The fear of man lays a snare,
but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.
Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Slide 6

Slide 7

Philippians 4:6-9 (ESV)

6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

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Slide 8

What are some potential outcomes of a fear-based engagement with culture?

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Slide 9

What are some potential outcomes of a fear-based engagement with culture?

Fight – Vilifying and trying to overcome others to protect our beliefs, group and identity.

Flight - Isolating from the world to preserve our beliefs, group and identity.

Fusion - Fully embracing the world at the cost of our beliefs, group and identity.

Question: Do you feel these categories are fair? Why or why not? Would you add any additional ones?

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Slide 10

"Our fear easily isolates and pits us against each other in a contest for security and safety, and God continually commands us not to fear but to trust in Him, the Creator and sustainer of the community into which we were called."

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 52. Kindle.

"What is this asking me to love? Who is this asking me to fear or hate? And what kind of good life is it describing? How can I be conscious of that so that I recognize where that doesn't line up with what Scripture tells me?"

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Holy Post Podcast*, episode 420, published September 2, 2020, accessed September 4, 2020, https://www.holypost.com/post/episode-420-four-false-political-gospels-with-kaitlyn-schiess.

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Slide 11

What is "faithful presence" and how is it different?

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Slide 12

Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)

. . . 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [. . .] 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Question: What is "faithful presence" and how is it different?

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Slide 13

First, faithful presence means that we are to be fully present to each other within the community of faith and fully present to those who are not. Whether within the community of believers or among those outside the church, we imitate our creator and redeemer: we pursue each other, identify with each other, and direct our lives toward the flourishing of each other through sacrificial love.

Second, faithful presence requires that Christians be fully present and committed to their tasks

Third, faithful presence in the world means that Christians are fully present and committed in their spheres of social influence, whatever they may be: their families, neighborhoods, voluntary activities, and places of work.

James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 244, 246-247, Kindle.

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Slide 14

Unlike fortification (flight), the incarnational church (faithful presence) seeks to follow Jesus into every sphere of creation. Unlike accommodation (fusion), the incarnational church not only moves fully into the world but also retains the integrity of its God-given character and proclamation as it does so. And unlike domination (fight), the incarnational church sees its movement into the world not as an angry movement of conquest but as a hopeful movement of redemptive love; seeking not to triumph over its neighbors, but to work for their flourishing.

Gregory Thompson, "The Church in Our Time: Nurturing Congregations of Faithful Presence," (Charlottesville, VA: New City Commons, October 2011), 12, https://www.flourishcollective.org/academy/wp-content/uploads/The-Church-In-Our-Time-A-New-City-Commons-White-Paper_4.pdf.

Faithful Presence – Trust Jesus and live completely for him, in whatever context he has us, for the good of those around us.

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Slide 15

Have you seen examples of what you would consider "faithful presence" in the public square?

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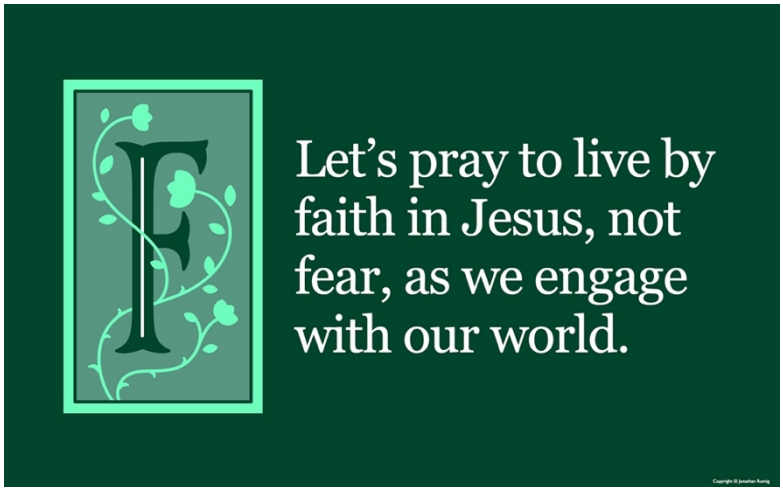
Slide 16


Let's pray to live by faith in Jesus, not fear, as we engage with our world.

Matthew 22:35-40

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Love God & Neighbor

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / October 17th, 2021

(S1) Tom is leaning into his computer screen as his fingers slam down on his keyboard. His brow is furrowed, and he can feel his blood pressure rising. "I can't believe Sam believes this junk," he mutters as he forcefully types his response to Sam's most recent Facebook post. Sam had posted another biased, misinformed poorly-written article, and he is about to unequivocally show him the error of his ways.

Tom has been watching Sam for months now post article after article on Facebook that is completely opposite of what Tom believes to be true. At first, Tom tried to respond gently. He took his time and wrote out well-reasoned logical arguments and linked to good articles, but to no avail. Sam keeps posting, keeps arguing with him, keeps frustrating him to no end. Sam is Tom's "political nemesis."

Tom finishes writing his response and uses ALL CAPS in the important parts to make sure Sam gets it. As his finger is about to click the send button, he feels a tug on his heart. Is this how we're supposed to engage? Should I be this angry? What does God want? But Tom ignores all that and clicks send.

Can any of us relate? Politics make us upset, sometimes even angry, especially when people we know do things we think are wrong? How'd we get here? Is it their fault? Or is something going on inside of us? The book of Proverbs tells us that what we put into our hearts affects what comes out.

> **(S2) Proverbs 4:23** (NIV)
> Above all else, guard your heart,
> for everything you do flows from it.

Our heart is the core of who we are. Some even call it our "control center."[1] And what we put into our core impacts the kind of fruit we bear. Politics, especially partisanship (picking a side and fighting for it), have a way of weaseling into our hearts. So while Tom might be right about some of the things that Sam believes, the anger he's expressing actually flows from inside as a result of what he has put into his heart. The kind of media, news, radio, websites, and opinions we listen to shape what comes out.

(S3) Politics affect our hearts.

We saw last week in our first sermon *Faith, Not Fear*, didn't we? Fear shapes how we engage in the world. Fear begets fear. Fear can't produce love, but faith can. We express our faith through faithful presence—trusting Jesus and being present where he has us. The only way we can be "faithful and present" is if God has gotten ahold of our hearts.

A lawyer once asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is, which is another way of asking the best way to follow God. Jesus didn't say it's defeating the opposing political party or making culture more acceptable to him, but loving God with everything we got.

> **(S4) Matthew 22:35-40** (ESV)
> 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Here Jesus is quoting two Old Testament passages about loving God and others. The lawyer would have known that Jesus was first talking about the *Shema*. The *Shema* was this prayer God taught the Israelites when he brought them out of spiritual, religious, and political captivity in Egypt. Here's how it starts:

> **(S5) Deuteronomy 6:4-6** (ESV)
> 4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

Many Israelites said this prayer twice a day, once in the morning and the evening. Tim Mackie calls the *Shema* a "Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise."[2] It was both a worship song and a pledge of allegiance. The *Shema* continually reminded Israel that God defined them as a people and came first. As we think about the Greatest Commandment, loving God, and its roots in the *Shema*, let's remember how God defines us, his people, the church and calls us to love him first above all else.

(S6) Love God before politics.

The *Shema* was a continual reminder that the greatest thing God wants from his people is our complete and total love. That means God wants our love for him to form and shape and control our hearts, not a political party, not a news station, but his Spirit, Scripture, and church. We foster the love of God in our hearts so that love for God will come first before our politics and will shape the way we engage in the world. Then we'll enter the public square with the goal not of winning but of loving God and bringing him glory. That's a one-degree shift that could lead us as Christians into an entirely different way of engaging in politics.

If you're feeling frustrated with the politics around you, stop and spend time with God. Commune with the Father through prayer and solitude. Seek to know Christ and be known by Christ so that Christ will protect your heart. Ask Jesus to come and change your perceptions and give you greater wisdom as you search his word and talk with your church family about difficult issues like these. Love for God is our foundation.

As part of my Doctor of Ministry studies, I read an author who showed that at certain times in people's lives, their politics shape their faith and what they believe about God. Typically, we think our faith in God shapes our politics; but political convictions often shape our faith in God. People often form political opinions (and take sides) earlier in life than their religious

convictions. In the church, this can result in "political echo chambers" as like-minded people gather together and reinforce each other and actually create a hostile environment for those with different political beliefs.[3]

I don't want politics to form the church. I don't want my politics to determine how I love God and neighbor, but politics has a way of shaping God into our own image. God is on our side and votes the way we vote. Politics has a way of influencing who we're even willing to call our neighbor. This is why being a part of a church family that doesn't all hold the same opinions is so important. It helps us see our blind spots and apply God's word to every aspect of life. *Politics affect our hearts, so we seek to love God before politics.*

But how can we know if we love God first? One of the ways is to look at the second commandment. Because genuinely loving God first will lead to loving our neighbors before ourselves.

(S7) Love our neighbor before ourselves.

When the lawyer asked him which commandment was greatest, Jesus first answered with the *Shema*, love God completely, and second added "love your neighbor" from the book of Leviticus.

> **(S8) Leviticus 19:18** (ESV)
> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

This law came right at the end of a series of commandments about how to live in community. Together they could all be summed up as "love your neighbor." But really, who is my neighbor? Do we really have to love those we disagree with politically? And what does loving them mean?

Tom wishes he didn't click the "send" button when he replied to Sam's most recent post on Facebook. Some of Sam's Facebook friends, people Tom doesn't know, immediately jump on his case. They reply just as harshly as Tom posted and begin to attack Tom personally. It's made him feel terrible. And to top it all off, no one has spoken up for Tom, not anyone from his church, not even his pastor, who is often very active on Facebook. It quickly grows to such a point that Tom is thinking of deactivating his account for good.

Then something unexpected happens; Sam finally replies to Tom's comment. He takes a much different tone than everyone else. He tells the others to stop attacking Tom, and while they have some genuine ideological disagreements, he doesn't want anyone criticizing Tom personally. This is the last thing Tom expected. To Tom's complete surprise, Sam messages him and invites him out to coffee. Tom accepts and is surprised again when the first thing Sam does is apologize for his Facebook friends and ask Tom how he's doing.

Together Sam and Tom begin to talk. And something about looking his "political nemesis" in the face begins to soften Tom's heart. He apologizes for his ALL CAPS post, and they have a deep and meaningful conversation. While Tom doesn't agree with everything Sam says, he feels he understands him a little better. Sam even pays for Tom's coffee. Together, they leave not as enemies but as "frenemies," okay, friends.

In Luke 10, a lawyer asks Jesus the same question, trying to validate and justify himself. "Who is my neighbor?" he asks Jesus, not because he wants to love those different from him, but because he wants to narrow the scope of those he has to love. In response, Jesus tells him the story of the Good Samaritan.

> **(S9) Luke 10:30-37** (ESV)
> 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **(S10)** 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The lawyer tries to justify his love of God and neighbor, but Jesus shows the lawyer doesn't love either as he should. The lawyer would have no problem loving the priest, the Levite, or being friends with the Jew who got robbed, but he would have hated the Samaritan. Samaritans were outcasts. They weren't considered Jewish because they'd intermarried with other nations. They built their own temple, which the Jews destroyed.[4] Jesus' disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54). The lawyer so dislikes Samaritans he won't even call him by that name; "The one who showed him mercy."

And yet, the Samaritan is an example for us of how we're supposed to love our neighbor. When others are attacked, we defend with grace and mercy. Where others are wounded, we bring healing and compassion. Where others rob and take, we give and demonstrate unrepayable generosity. This is the politic of Jesus.

Where Satan accuses, Jesus defends with his blood, body, and perfect life. Where the world is wounded with sin and brokenness, Jesus binds and heals. Where the robber steals and takes, Jesus gives everything he has, including his own life. When Jesus died on the cross to pay our debts, he was just like the Samaritan who put his own life at risk and paid the debt of a man lying near-death in the rode.

Do you want to be a part of the way of Jesus? We're most like the priest, the Levite, and even the robbers in the story. We're sinful and broken. But we can invite Jesus to come and heal us and make us new. Only through him working in us can we ever truly love God and love our neighbors. We love Jesus and our neighbors because he first loved us (see 1 John 4:19).

Who's your "political nemesis?" Whose your Sam or Tom? Who does Jesus want you to love at a cost to yourself? Politics shape how we love our neighbor or who we are even willing to call our neighbor. Jesus takes our definition of neighbor and expands it way past our comfort zone.

Voting is one way to love our neighbors. So often, I think we use voting and legislation as a way to defeat our neighbors or protect ourselves from them.[5] But if we're so satisfied with our love for God, what do we have to fear from our neighbor? Nothing, which then frees us to pray for them, to show kindness to them, and maybe even to vote for things that disadvantage us but benefits them.

We can also love our neighbor when election season is far away.[6] How are we loving our neighbors then, especially in our towns and churches? How are we living the politic of Jesus every day? The Samaritan got close to his enemy; he got "proximate."[7] We have to get close to those different than us if we're ever going to love them. *Politics affect our hearts, so we love and neighbors before ourselves*. Ultimately, we…

(S11) Love our enemies like Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus' political manifesto, he says this:

> **(S12) Matthew 5:43-44** (ESV)
> 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Did you know this verse was like "the John 3:16 of the [early church]"?[8] The church fathers quoted it all the time as they experienced real suffering and persecution, even death.[9] We're not being burned at the stake or thrown to the lions, so I don't know what excuse we have not to love our enemies. One author writes:

> Our ideological opponents are not enemies to be destroyed. They are peers to be persuaded. It reminds me of Abraham Lincoln's retort to an older woman who was criticizing him for being too soft. She felt that Lincoln wasn't using strong enough rhetoric about the Confederate Southerners, whom she considered irreconcilable enemies who must be destroyed. Lincoln calmly replied, "Why madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"[10]

How many of us have thought of our ideological opponents as our "enemies" at some point? When we're tempted to believe our political opposites are our enemies, let's remember:

> **(S13) Ephesians 6:12** (ESV)
> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and Socialists are not our enemies. They are people made in the image of God worthy of dignity and honor. They need rescue from our real enemy, Satan, sin, and death. Jesus came to rescue them and to rescue you. Sometimes we forget that before Jesus saved us, we were God's enemies (Ephesians 2:1-10). But God, at cost to himself, sent his Son to rescue us. Jesus showed us mercy.

(S14) We love God and neighbor, even enemies, because Jesus first loved us.

In our power, we can't do this. But if we are communing with Christ and loving God, it's possible for him to love our political enemies through us. In Christ, we can love our neighbors before ourselves, even at cost to ourselves. In Christ, we can even love our enemies, our political nemesis on Facebook or across the picket line, or at church. *We love God and neighbor, even enemies, because Jesus first loved us.*

I want to close by reading you a closing story from *Jesus Untangled* by Keith Giles. It's "the story of a Baptist pastor during the American Revolution" and illustrates loving God, neighbor, and enemy.[11]

> In the book, *The Grace of Giving*, author Stephen Olford tells the story of a Baptist pastor during the American Revolution. The pastor, Peter Miller, lived in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, and one of his dearest friends was General George Washington. (Maybe you've heard of him?)
>
> In the town of Ephrata there also lived a spiteful troublemaker named Michael Wittman who did all he could to oppose and humiliate Mr. Miller.
>
> One day, Michael Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to death. When he heard the news, Peter Miller set out to Philadelphia to plead for the life of his enemy.
>
> After walking seventy miles—on foot—Miller petitioned his friend, General Washington, to spare Wittman's life.
>
> "No, Peter," General Washington said. "I cannot grant you the life of your friend."
>
> "My friend?" exclaimed the old preacher. "He's not my friend. In fact, he is the bitterest enemy I have."
>
> "What?" cried Washington. "You've walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in different light. I'll grant your pardon."
>
> And he did.
>
> That day, Peter Miller and Michael Wittman walked back home to Ephrata together. When they arrived home, they were no longer enemies. They were friends.[12]

We love God and neighbor, even (political) enemies, because Jesus first loved us. Let's pray.

> *Benediction* - **Matthew 5:43-44** (ESV)
> 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my third sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *Love God & Neighbor*. Here are several follow-up spiritual exercises for continuing to learn and grow this week:

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you identify those places in your politics that are shaping your understanding of God. Follow-up by asking God to help you love him first and foremost and that he would shape the way you engage with the world. Next, ask God to help you better love your neighbor and your "political nemesis." Identify any the Holy Spirit brings to mind and take time to pray for their faith and wisdom.

Listen (sermon): Listen to "Tim Keller | What a Minor Prophet Teaches Us About Nationalism and Race, Grace, and Mission" (April 3, 2019; 62 minutes). YouTube: https://youtu.be/Uj8j03TadOg. Pastor Timothy Keller preaches the book of Jonah and helps us see how Christians and the church should prioritize preaching the gospel but also care about our world's needs.

Read (article): Read the four-page article: "Why We Need the Church to Disciple Our Politics" by Matthew Hawkins (March 23, 2021 – *The Gospel Coalition*). Hawkins explains why it's good for churches to address politics and how best to do so. This article helps frame why we as a church are doing discussing politics.

Read (article): Read the four-page article: "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs" by Michele Margolis (July 11, 2018; *The New York Times*). I mentioned how partisan politics sometimes shape what we believe about God. Margolis studied whether this is true or not from a researcher's perspective. Here she summarizes her book and some main highlights of her findings.

Thank you, and may you love Christ and love your neighbor this week.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. In case you missed it, here's a link to last week's extra sermon on *The Politics of Fear*.

1. Tedd Tripp's *Shepherding a Child's Heart* inspired some of my thoughts in this section. Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), chap. 1, Kindle.

2. Tim Mackie, "What is the Shema?" BibleProject, 2018, accessed January 18, 2021, https://bibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema/.

3. Michele Margolis, "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs," *The New York Times*, July 11, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html.

4. "Don Carson | The Parable of the Good Samaritan," The Gospel Coalition, YouTube, posted December 1, 2019, accessed October 5, 2021.

5. For example, listen to *Holy Post* podcast "Episode 473: Did Texas End Abortion? & Drug War Casualties with Christina Dent," publsiehd September 8, 2021, accessed October 12, 2021 https://youtu.be/lNS_9VtoEyM?t=1192. Start at 19:52.

6. Skye Jethani, *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* (self-published) chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

7. "Grace, Justice & Mercy: An evening with Bryan Stevenson & Tim Keller," Center for Faith & Work, May 21, 2016, accessed January 18, 2021, https://www.redeemer.com/r/grace_and_race.

8. Preston Sprinkle, "Nonviolence: The Rhythm of Christianity," YouTube, published January 24, 2017, accessed October 16, 2021 https://youtu.be/sITAH1d1Yk0. Sprinkle originally said "the John 3:16 of pre-Constantine Christianity."

9. Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013) 162, Kindle.

10. Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 25, Kindle.

11. Keith Giles, *Jesus Untangled: Crucifying Our Politics to Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2017) 85, Kindle. Story taken from Stephen Olford, *The Grace of Giving: A Biblical Study of Christian Stewardship*, *Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000).

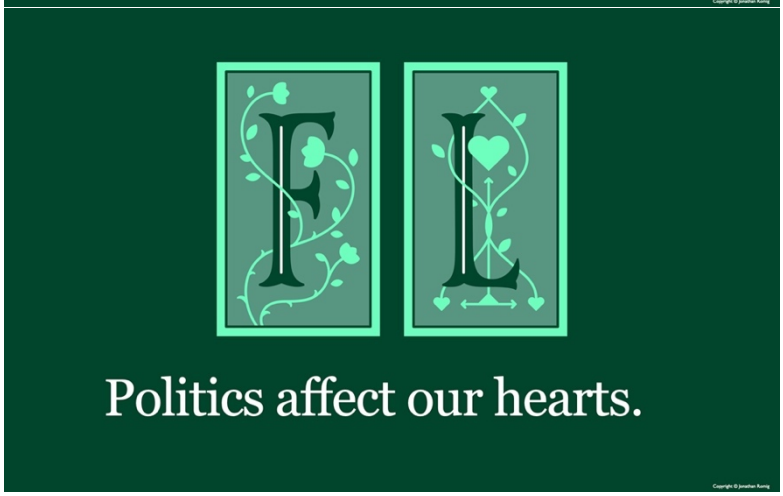
12. Giles, *Jesus Untangled*, 85, Kindle. See previous endnote.

#3 Sermon Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3



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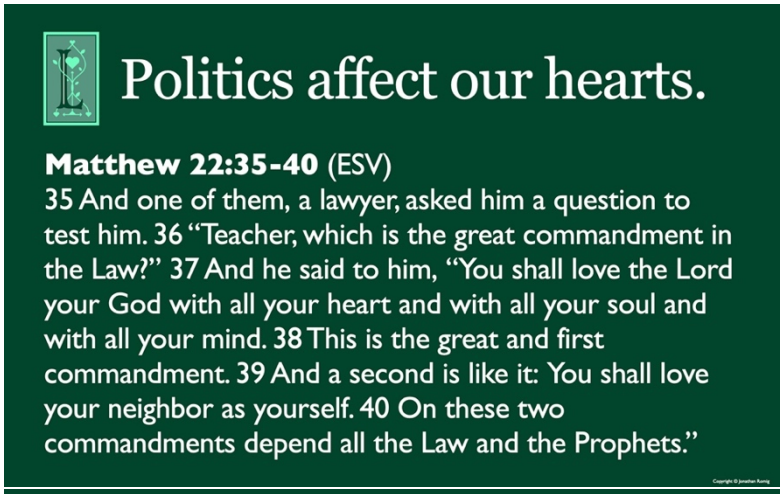

Politics affect our hearts.
Matthew 22:35-40 (ESV)
35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

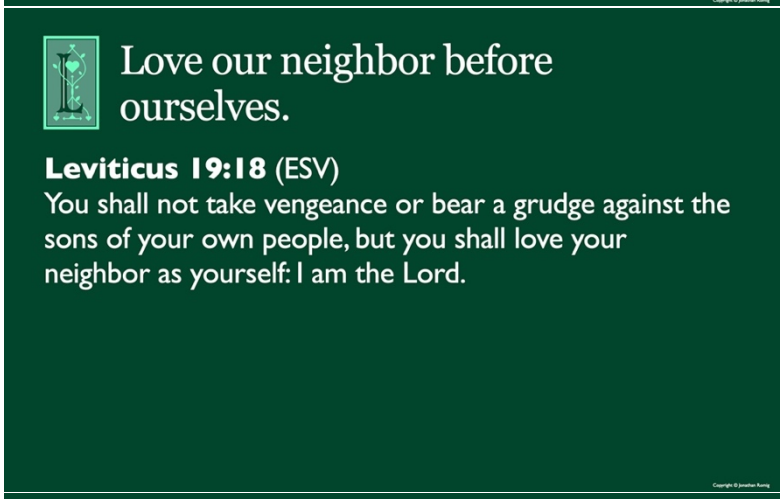
Slide 5

Politics affect our hearts.
Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (ESV)
4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

Slide 6

Slide 7

Slide 8


Love our neighbor before ourselves.
Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)
You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

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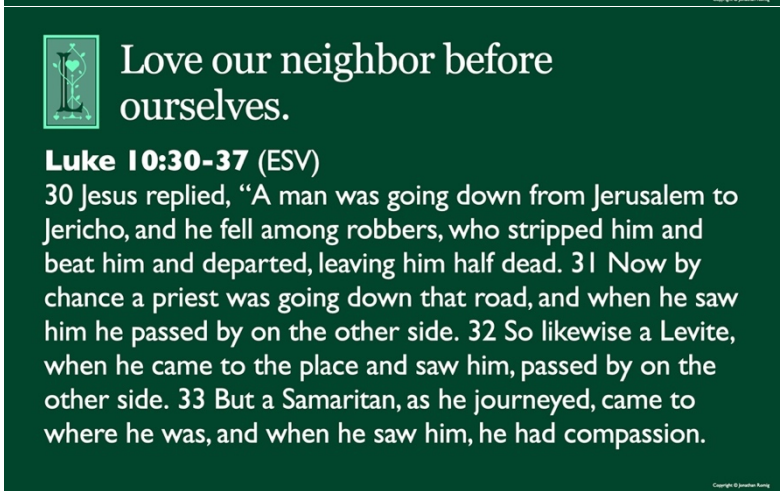
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30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

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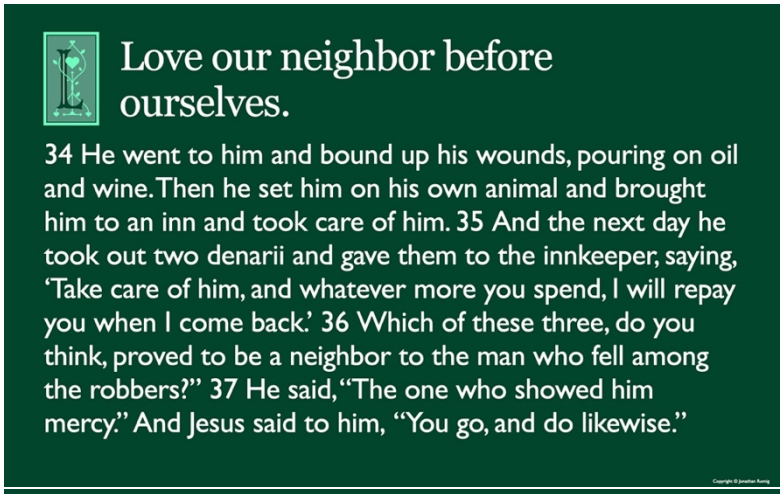
Love our neighbor before ourselves.
34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

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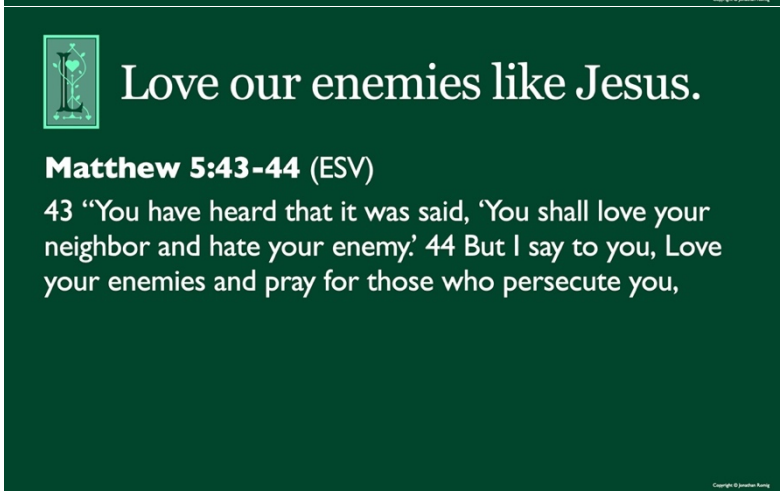
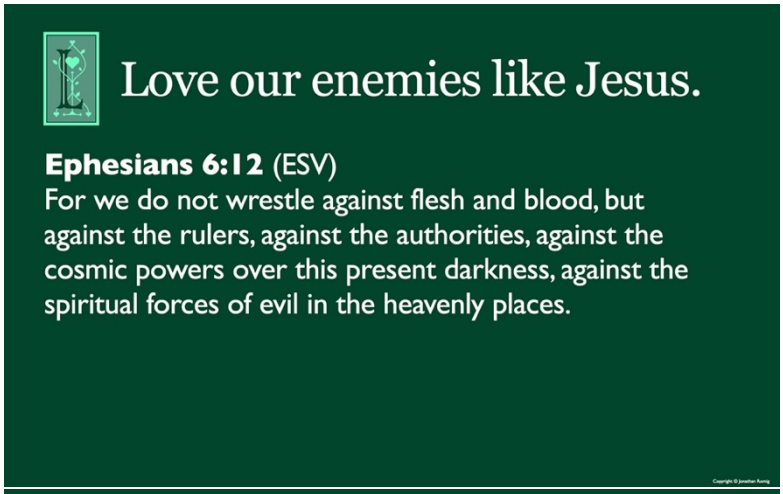
Slide 12


Love our enemies like Jesus.
Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV)
43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Slide 13


Love our enemies like Jesus.
Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)
For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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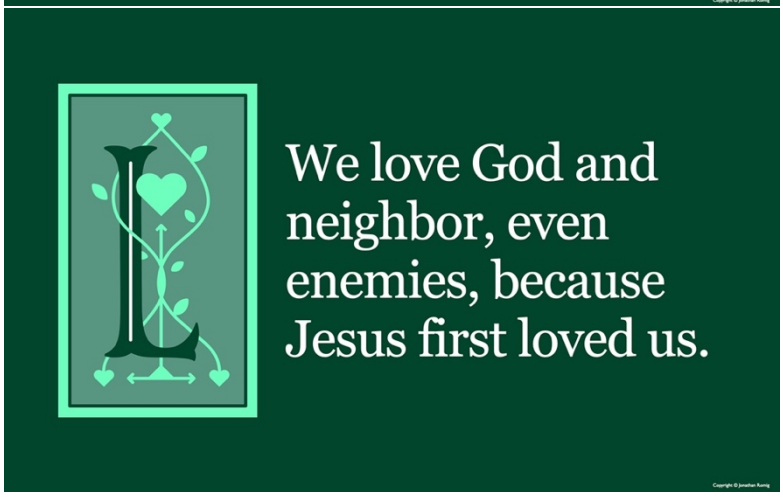


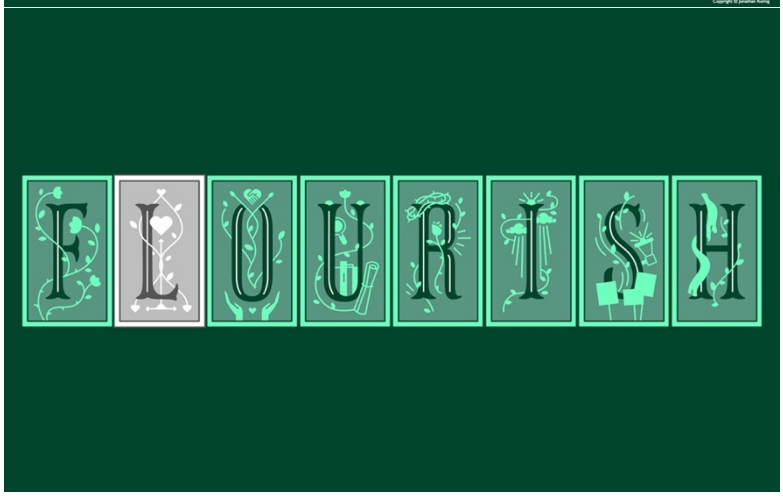
#3 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

Slide 3



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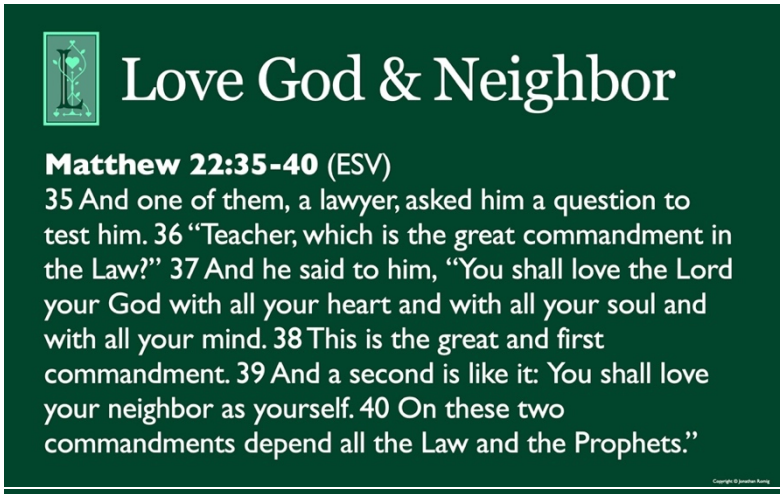
Love God & Neighbor
Matthew 22:35-40 (ESV)
35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

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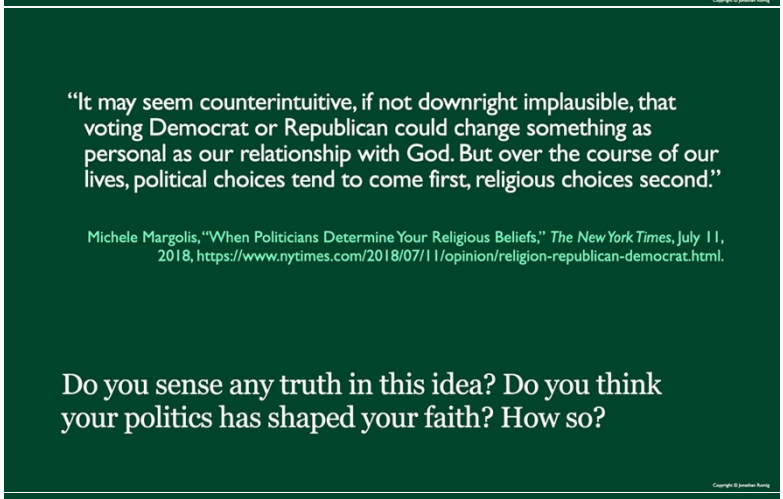
"It may seem counterintuitive, if not downright implausible, that voting Democrat or Republican could change something as personal as our relationship with God. But over the course of our lives, political choices tend to come first, religious choices second."
Michele Margolis, "When Politicians Determine Your Religious Beliefs," The New York Times, July 11, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/religion-republican-democrat.html.
Do you sense any truth in this idea? Do you think your politics has shaped your faith? How so?

Slide 6

Slide 7

"The supreme good that makes human beings truly happy—in my terminology, the proper content of a flourishing life—consists in love of God and neighbor and enjoyment of both."

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 48, Kindle.

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Slide 8

"While our relationships to chocolate chip cookies and football teams can certainly dishonor God, perhaps we've watered down the language of idolatry to the point where we miss the real idols. Political participation has a unique ability to inspire idolatry in people precisely because it so often involves promises of protection and provision, requires sacrifices, legitimizes authority, and inspires submission and worship."

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 35, Kindle.

Do you think politics are prone to creating idols? Why or why not? What might our political idols be?

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Slide 9

What might it mean to love our neighbors before ourselves in our political engagement?

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Slide 10

"Politics should be done out of a desire for the common good, out of service to our fellow citizens. It should be a manifestation of our love for our neighbors."

Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 25, Kindle.

I conclude that Jesus' command that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" means that I should seek the good of my neighbors in every aspect of society, including seeking to bring about good government and good laws.

Wayne Grudem, *Politics – According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010) 48, Kindle.

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Slide 11

The most important thing is not what you decide inside the voting booth, but how you love your neighbors once you leave it."

Skye Jethani, *The Voting Booth: A new vision for Christian engagement in a post-Christian culture* (self-published) chap. "Act 3," Kindle.

Question: Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

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Slide 12

Love God, Neighbor, Enemy

Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV)
43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

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Slide 13

"Jesus's command to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44) was quoted by ten different writers in twenty-eight different passages, making it the most cited passage by early Christian writers before Constantine. Loving one's enemies was the ethical heartbeat of early Christianity. It's what separated Christians from everyone else …"

"A person who chooses to love his or her enemies can have no enemies. That person is left only with neighbors."

Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013) 162, 124 Kindle.

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Slide 14

What does it mean to love our enemies in politics?

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Slide 15

Love God, Neighbor, Enemy

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)
For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We remember our true threat is not people but powers.

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Slide 16

Let's close by praying to love God and neighbor more, and our political enemies too.

Jeremiah 29:4-7

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Other Peoples' Good

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / October 24th, 2021

(S1-2) We are now in our fourth week, third word, of our sermon series, *Faith & Flourishing in Politics*. F stands for "Faith, Not Fear." L is "Love God & Neighbor," and today we're on O, "Other Peoples' Good."

A British game show in the late 2000s tested whether people would put other peoples' good before their own. **(S3)** The show was called *Golden Balls*, which was named after golden balls the size of tennis balls that had money from £10 to £75,000 (pounds sterling). The show started with four contestants, but the game eliminated them down to two who had to end by battling for the total they had won so far. It all came down to the contestants choosing "split" or "steal." Each contestant had a choice they would reveal:

1. If they each chose to split, they would both walk away with half the money.
2. If they each chose to steal, they would both walk away with nothing.
3. If one contestant chose to steal and the other split, the one who decided to steal would walk away with all the money, and the one who chose split would walk away with nothing.

At this point in the game, the game show host directs contestants to talk to each other, at which point they make promises that they will split the money with each other. There's a famous episode where a big tough guy sits across the table from a young pretty blonde girl. He promises that he'll split the pot, £100,000. He says it over and over. And she's so sweet and timid. **(S4)** And when they both open the balls, she steals it all, and the man collapses with his face in his arms.[1] Some call it "the most savage game show moment of all time."[2] What would you do? Would you split or steal? Would you seek both your good or only yours?

As we move from a British game show to thinking about our world, how should Christians live? We've been asking, "How should the church engage in the world?" Should we focus on preserving ourselves, on protecting our group identity and beliefs? Or does God somehow call us to prioritize others?

(S5) God calls his people to seek *other peoples' good*.

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, Adam and Eve and all of humankind broke their relationship with God. God exiled us from the garden of Eden, which was a temple where God dwelled with people. But God had a plan. Later in Genesis, God called a man named Abram (later renamed Abraham) and said that out of his descendants, he would form a great nation that would bless all the nations (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6). Abraham fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob, who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. Israel was supposed to love God and be a light to the nations, but instead, they rebelled and acted selfishly (Exodus 19:6).

God promised Israel that if they sinned against him, he would banish them into exile just like he once banished Adam and Eve from the garden. And that's what eventually happened. They kept sinning, so God expelled them from his temple in Jerusalem, which had garden imagery all over it (1 Kings 7:20, 36). God sent Assyria and then Babylon to take his people into captivity. When Babylon captured Jerusalem and Judah, all seemed lost. But God had a surprising plan for Israel. Even though his people were now in exile, God wanted them to live like they were in the temple garden of Eden. Remember the Genesis one mandate?

> **(S6) Genesis 1:28** (ESV)
> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Remember Genesis one? God took chaos and created order, beauty, and flourishing. Then God gave people the right to do the same thing by making them in his image and giving them dominion. He called us to go out and be fruitful and multiply and create flourishing out of the chaos, and politics is one way we do that. We take our society and culture, and we try to order it for good. Now skip forward to Israel in Babylon. Israel is in a state of chaos, in disorder. Their rulers and their best and brightest are exiled into captivity. What should they do? Feel dismayed and give up on life? Or work to bring order and beauty to the chaos?

> **(S7) Jeremiah 29:4-7** (ESV)
> 4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Do you notice any parallels between Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 29? God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1, and he tells the exiles in Babylon to plant gardens and make babies in exile—be fruitful and multiply. God uses the same Hebrew word for "multiply" (rabah) in both passages. God is re-calling his people to do the work of Genesis 1. Take chaos and create order and beauty, not just for you, but your neighbor too. Steward your time in Babylon, work towards its flourishing and good.

I've heard many Christians express frustration over the state of our nation. If that's your assessment, if you feel like we live in a time of chaos and disorder or feel politically homeless, like you're in exile, go back to our Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 29 mandate. Plant gardens, make babies, steward creation and society, and seek the flourishing of our neighbors and city. *God calls his people to seek other peoples' good.*

How do we seek other peoples' good? There are three ways: 1) cultivate shalom, 2) seek the common good, and 3) pray for the city. Together, these three things help us bring order and beauty to the chaos, to our exile.

(S8) 1) Cultivate *shalom*

Jeremiah 29:7a says, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile…" Wait a second. This letter is to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. That's not us. **(S9–10)** Peter actually identifies believers in the New Testament as "exiles" (1 Peter 1:1)[3] and Paul says our "citizenship is in heaven…" (Phil 3:20). That means while we may be in a different time and place, we're still exiles who take the same posture.

As believers, our true home is not Israel, or Westford, America, or Massachusetts, but the kingdom of God. That means we're also live in Babylon today—American Babylon, Canadian Babylon, or Turkmenistan Babylon. Wherever our Babylon, what are we supposed to do? "Seek the welfare of the city!" That word for welfare is "shalom." Shalom is far richer than our English word for peace.

> **(S11)** The webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight [. . .] Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.[4]

We think of peace as the "absence of conflict."[5] But shalom is harmony, flourishing, and how things ought to be, with both God and with each other. Shalom captures heaven and earth's goodness together.

(S12) As Christians, God calls us to seek the "shalom" of the city, in our case "Westford" or wherever we live. Did you know the Greek word for city, "polis," is where we get our word for "politics?" Aristotle wrote a work called "*politikê*" where he talked about running "city-states like Athens and Sparta."[6] So to care about politics is to care about your city and state.[7] Politics is different than partisanship, which is about party loyalty to being a Republican or Democrat. Politics is caring about the flourishing of the community of people where God has placed you. So we've been doing politics as a church when we care for our city, and one way to care for your city is to get involved in politics at a local level. I chatted with one of my church-planter friends, and he is running for city council. He cares about his city.

The concept of "politics" is not so different than "shalom," but shalom takes the theory of politics and applies God's vision of flourishing. How can we bring God's vision for flourishing, justice, and goodness to a group of people so that they live and enjoy life together in harmony and peace with one another and God? We can't offer flourishing if we're fighting the city, fleeing from the city, or fusing with the city, but only by faithful presence—faithfully loving God and neighbor as we are present in our cities and states.

There's a town in Northern Ireland named "Londonderry," or at least that's what the Protestants and pro-British supporters call it. But the Catholics and Irish-nationalists want to rename it "Derry" because that's its original name and what they call it.[8] **(S13)** As you can see here, "it is common to see the 'London' part of the city's name spray-painted over on road signs in republican areas of the north."[9] This city has experienced a lot of violence and division and is further divided by a river running through it, with most Catholics living on one side and most Protestants on the other.[10] **(S14)** To address the division, the city has built a new 900-foot bridge that curves like a snake across the river for walkers, joggers, and cyclists, all in an attempt to bring people together. They've named it "Peace Bridge." Shalom is taking a city divided—Jew

and Babylonian, Catholic and Protestant, Republican and Democrat—and building a bridge to foster peace and harmony.

How might we build a peace bridge? How might we cultivate shalom in our city and with our neighbors? That's the kind of politics God calls us as Christians to do. *God calls his people to seek other peoples' good. 1) Cultivate shalom; and…*

(S15) 2) Seek the *common good*.

One of the things I want to do in this sermon series on politics is to develop a shared language for discussing faith and civic engagement. A word I think is helpful and is derived from biblical principles is the concept of the "common good." The "common good" is not a communist or capitalist word. Rather, it predates both ideologies back to Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic priest who lived in the 13th century, and Pope Leo XIII, who developed it more fully in the 19th century.[11] The "common good" is meant to be a measure of how well the government is doing.[12] The common good asks if everyone is flourishing in society, starting with the most vulnerable and weak. We want to serve the poor and weak, right? Unless it decreases funding for my kids' school or creates low-income housing in my neighborhood (NIMBY: Not in my back yard!).

When the church functions as God intends, it demonstrates to the world the common good. Keller calls the church a "Counterculture for the common good." We're salt and light; bringing flavor to our cities and preserving what's good in culture, not separating ourselves from it. Remember Genesis 1? Remember how "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of waters" in verse 2? The Holy Spirit was there when there was only chaos and a void. And yet the Holy Spirit descended and brought order and beauty.

When the Jews were in exile in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Holy Spirit leaving the temple, God's presence departing Jerusalem (Ezekiel 11). But do you know where God's Spirit went when he left Jerusalem? The Holy Spirit went to Babylon to be with the exiles. God never left his people, even in exile. God's Spirit went with them to create order and beauty, shalom, and the common good in Babylon.

This happens again in the New Testament God sends his Holy Spirit back to Jerusalem, but this time not to the temple, but the new temple, the church. In the chaos of first-century Palestine, God sends his Holy Spirit to his exiles living in Jerusalem. **(S16)** Pentecost! All the disciples are in an upper room praying when the Holy Spirit descends as tongues of fire and hovers over them, like the Spirit hovered over creation. It's through these people that God is going to bless their Babylon, their city, once more, both with the gospel and helping the poor and needy. Here we find the clearest example of the common good in the New Testament.

> **(S17) Acts 2:42-47** (ESV)
> 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and

> generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

When people come together to love God, love neighbor, and seek the common good, God "multiplies" their community; more fruitfulness and flourishing just like Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 29. The Holy Spirit has come to redeem the city! What did the Holy Spirit do at Pentecost? He filled people to speak in multiple languages—the gift of tongues—so that travelers heard the gospel in their native language. **(S18)** Do you remember the tower of Babel in Genesis 11? The Tower of Babel was the first mega-city where a whole bunch of people got together to build a vast city and massive tower to climb up to heaven. But God sent the curse of babbling (speaking different languages) on the people to scatter them throughout the earth. The Hebrew word for Babel is the word Babylon.

Now you and I are in exile in our earthly Babylon, and God has sent us his Holy Spirit to share the gospel, cultivate *shalom*, and seek the common good of our cities. We create and enjoy the common good together.

(S19) Maybe you're thinking, "Okay, the common good is like a really big pizza."[13] We slice it up to make sure everyone gets a piece. As one author explains it, "The idea of a common good is that it is a good that only can be enjoyed in common with others."[14] **(S20)** So the common good is "more like a symphony."[15] Imagine trying to enjoy a symphony one instrument at a time. The violinist would start, then a flute would play, then a tuba, and finally a triangle would go ding-ding-ding! No. All the instruments have to come together to play at once to benefit the whole—the common good is enjoyed together.

The song of the common good is only possible because of the Holy Spirit. God himself is the common good. He's the melody that holds all other goods together. Jesus has come to restore God and humanity to harmony. Together we enjoy him. And you know how Jesus did it? By becoming common. He became common and exiled so you could become good.[16] Now because of Christ, you can share God's goodness, the ultimate common good, with others; and you can seek their shalom and the city's common good. How are we seeking the common good of our city? How are we sharing Christ and serving our community?

God calls his people to seek other peoples' good: 1) cultivate shalom; 2) seek the common good, and finally:

(S21) 3) Pray for the city.

The prophet Jeremiah calls the exiles to pray for the city—"pray to the Lord on its behalf…" Maybe you've heard believers pray this prayer for America from the Old Testament.[17]

> **(S22) 2 Chronicles 7:14** (ESV)
> if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

The idea is that if we Americans humble ourselves and stop sinning with things like abortion and homosexuality (less often greed, racism, or violence), God will forgive us and make America a

Christian nation. **(23)** Can I encourage us to be wary of praying this for America, to show "caution?" Remember the book of 2 Chronicles is written to the exiles in Babylon (a people called by God's name), and the closest parallel to those exiles are actually us, the church (Christians, called by the name of Christ). So, it's appropriate for us to pray some form of this prayer for our churches to repent and for God to heal us; but I think we can pray for Shalom for our city like Jeremiah says or pray what Paul prays in the New Testament:

> **(S24) 1 Timothy 2:1-4** (ESV)
> 1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Jeremiah calls us to pray for the flourishing of our cities, and Paul calls us to pray for the flourishing of our government officials. We pray for them to lead quiet, wise, and dignified lives and that they would come to salvation in Christ Jesus. It's okay to pray people out of office or against their bad policies.[18] But even as we pray against those things, let's pray for politicians, who are people too.

(S25) *God calls his people to seek other peoples' good: 1) cultivate shalom; 2) seek the common good; and 3) pray for the city.*

> *Benediction* – **Jeremiah 29:7** (ESV)
> But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my fourth sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *Other Peoples' Good*. Here are several follow-up spiritual exercises for continuing to learn and grow this week:

Listen (sermon 1/2): Listen to Tim Mackie preach on Daniel 3 and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego staying faithful to the one true God while in exile in Babylon. I had never heard the story of the fiery furnace quite like this. Listen here: "71. Faithfulness in Exile: Daniel Part 2 – The National Idol." (55 minutes) It's also available through Apple Podcasts.

Listen (sermon 2/2): Listen to Timothy Keller preach on what it means for the church to be "the salt of the earth" and "a city on a hill" from Matthew 5. He describes the church as a "Counter-Culture for the Common Good" (Gospel in Life link). YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/p7XcnJ6K7YA (34 minutes)

Question: Still wondering what the common good is, especially when it comes to Christians and politics? I found this short YouTube clip helpful: What exactly is the Common Good? by Duquesne University (4 minutes). Additionally, I found Andy Crouch's article helpful: What's so great about the common good? If you have trouble accessing it, let me know, and I can help.

Worship (music): Play the rap song *Shalom* by Urban Doxology (4 minutes). YouTube: https://youtu.be/9jGPaYSu6J8. This song adds poetic language to creation's desire for shalom, the flourishing of all. You can read the lyrics here.

Reflect & Pray: Take time to think about your city, where you live and work. How can you seek the shalom of your community? What people have you seen in your own life who have done this well? Now pause and pray and ask God to bless their efforts, and ask God how he might be leading you to seek the common good of your community. This may mean running for office, coaching your kid's soccer team, or participating in community activities. How does the Holy Spirit nudge you? Let's pray.

I hope these resources are helpful. Let me know what you think.

God bless,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. We talked about idolatry in politics during Christian Ed this morning. This article is an interesting follow-up as we try to love God first in all things, especially politics: Our Attraction to Idols Remains the Same, Even When the Names Change.

1. SocialChateau, “How To Spot A Liar (£100,000 Split or Steal) (Using Statement Analysis),” YouTube, published February 26, 2017, accessed October 13, 2021 https://youtu.be/0vYejrbiPBU.

2. “This Goldenballs £100,000 steal remains the most savage game show moment of all time” Joe, accessed October 15, 2021 https://www.joe.co.uk/entertainment/this-goldenballs-100000-steal-remains-the-most-savage-gameshow-clip-of-all-time-193429#.

3. 1 Peter 1:1, 17, 2:11; Hebrews 11:13.

4. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) 10.

5. Stephen Um, *Gospel Shaped Mercy Leader’s Guide: The Gospel Coalition Curriculum* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2017) 35.

6. Fred Miller, “Aristotle's Political Theory”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/aristotle-politics/. Emphasis his.

7. Thank you Skye Jethani for being the first to explain this to me on *The Holy Post* podcast.

8. James Wilson, “Why is Derry also called Londonderry?” IrishCentral, re-published May 7, 2021 (originally May 2017), accessed October 15, 2021 https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/derry-called-londonderry.

9. Wilson, “Why is Derry…” IrishCentral.

10. Mark Simpson, “New peace bridge is symbol of hope in 'stroke city',” BBC News, published June 24, 2011, accessed October 15, 2021 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-13901885.

11. Andy Crouch, What’s So Great About ‘The Common Good’? ChristianityToday, published October 12, 2012, accessed October 15, 2021 https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/november/whats-so-great-about-common-good.html.

12. Andy Crouch, What’s So Great About ‘The Common Good’? ChristianityToday, published October 12, 2012, accessed October 15, 2021 https://youtu.be/x6oSJg6wuBg.

13. See Jake Meador, *In Search of the Common Good: Christian Fidelity in a Fractured World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019) 115-116, Kindle. Meador introduces pizza vs. symphony illustration.

14. Meador, *In Search of the Common* Good, 115, Kindle.

15. Meador, *In Search of the Common* Good, 116, Kindle.

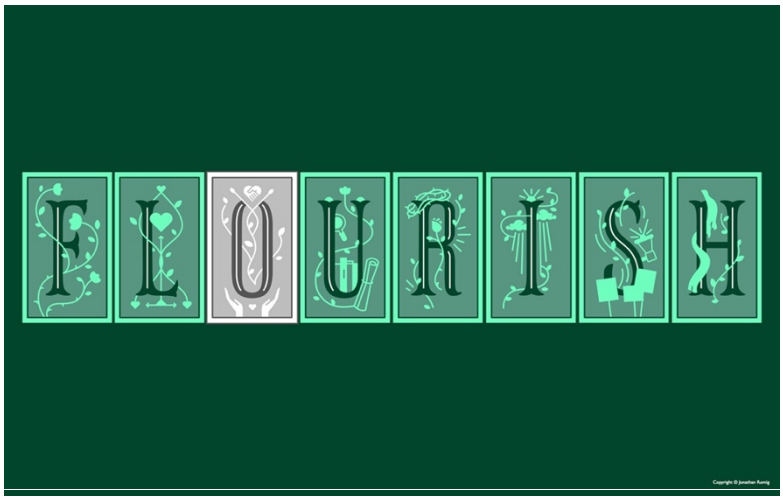
16. Matthew 27:46; Ephesians 2:17-19.

17. Russell Moore, “2 Chronicles 7:14 Isn’t About American Politics,” published January 14, 2016, accessed October 15, 2021 https://www.russellmoore.com/2016/01/14/2-chronicles-714-isnt-about-american-politics/.

18. Christopher J. H. Wright, interview by Christopher Reese, “Our Attraction to Idols Remains the Same, Even When the Names Change,” Christianity Today, January 29, 2021, accessed February 3, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/january-february/idolatry-old-testament-idol-names-change-attraction-remains.html. *Emphasis his.* He references Isaiah 10:1-2; Jeremiah 6:13-15; Ezekiel 22:26-29; Amos 2:6-7; 5:10, 12; Micah 3:1-3.

#4 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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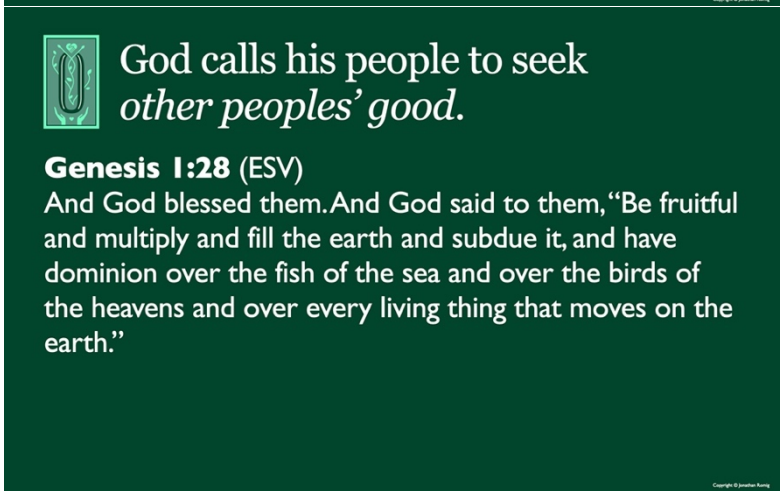
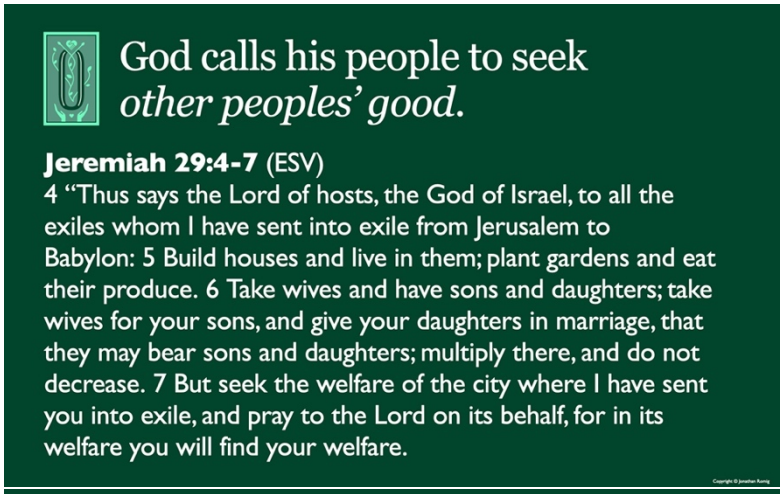

God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
Genesis 1:28 (ESV)
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Slide 7


God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ESV)
4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

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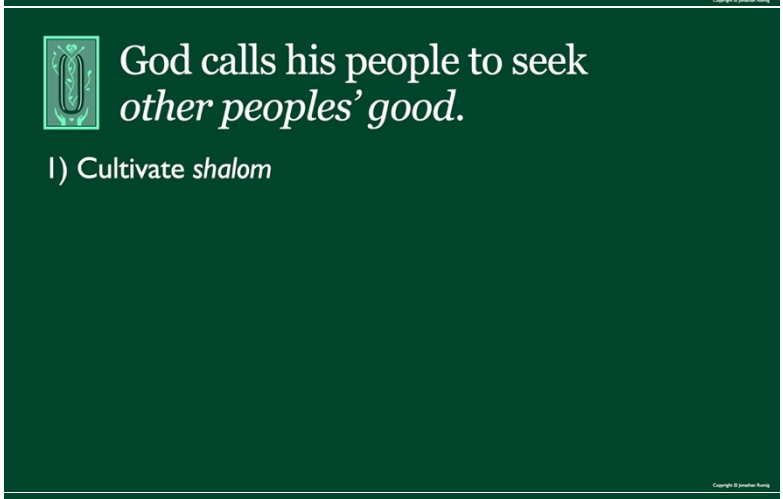

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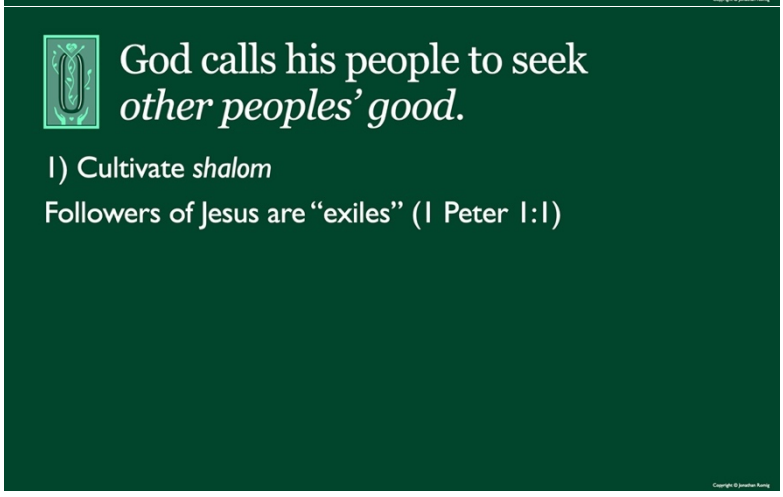

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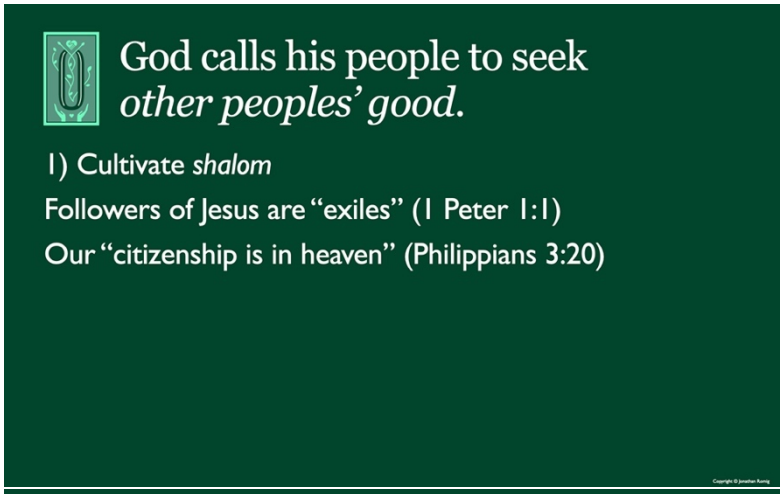
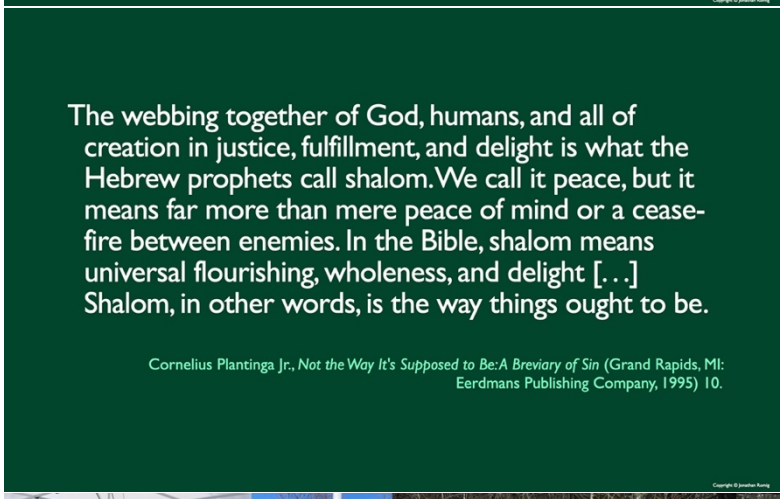

God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
1) Cultivate shalom
Followers of Jesus are "exiles" (1 Peter 1:1)
Our "citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20)

Slide 11


The webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight [. . .] Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.
Cornelius Plantinga Jr., Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995) 10.

Slide 12

Slide 13

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Slide 15

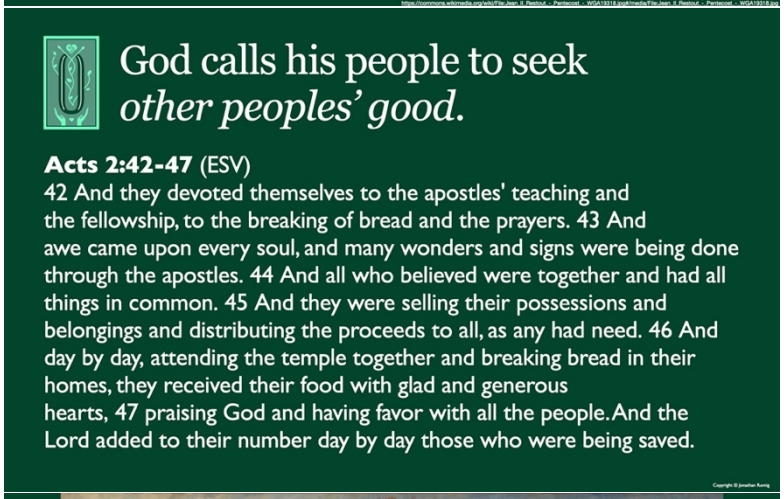
God calls his people to seek *other peoples' good.*

1) Cultivate *shalom*

2) Seek the *common good*

Slide 16

Slide 17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other peoples' good.
Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)
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the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And
awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done
through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all
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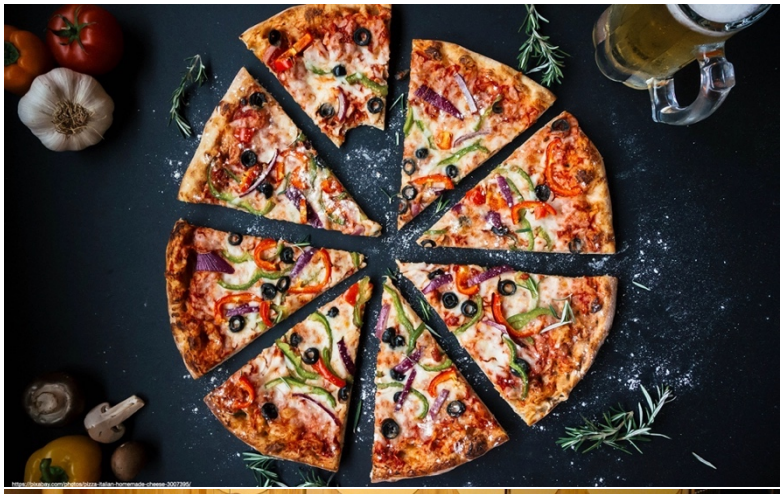

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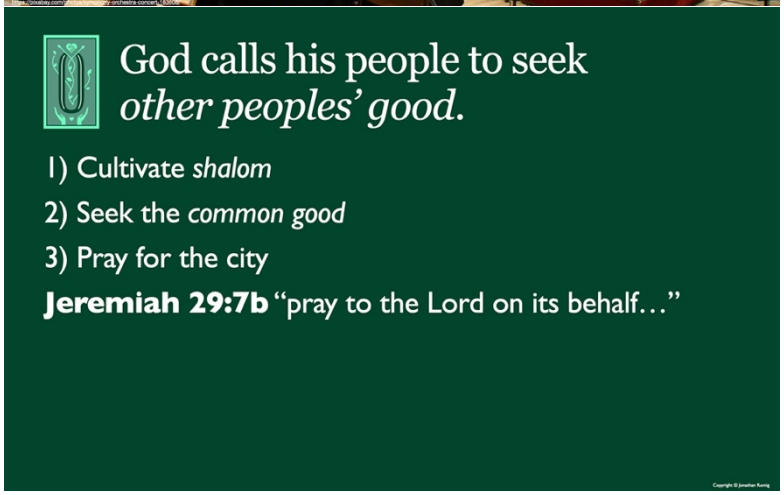
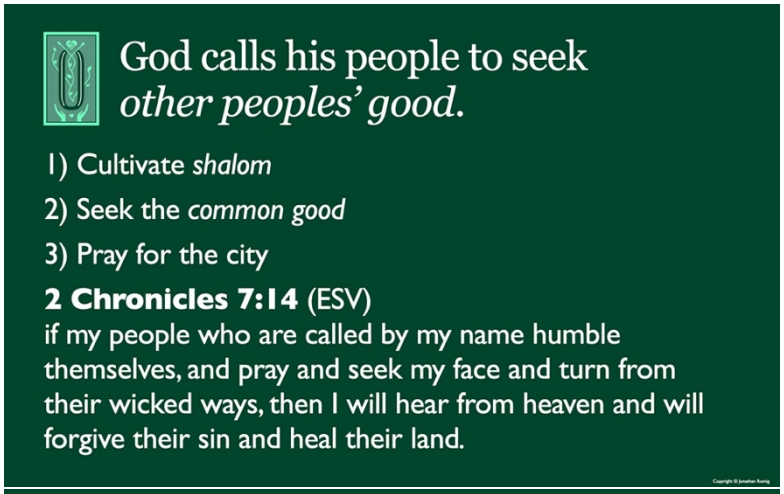

God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
1) Cultivate shalom
2) Seek the common good
3) Pray for the city
Jeremiah 29:7b "pray to the Lord on its behalf…"

Slide 22


God calls his people to seek
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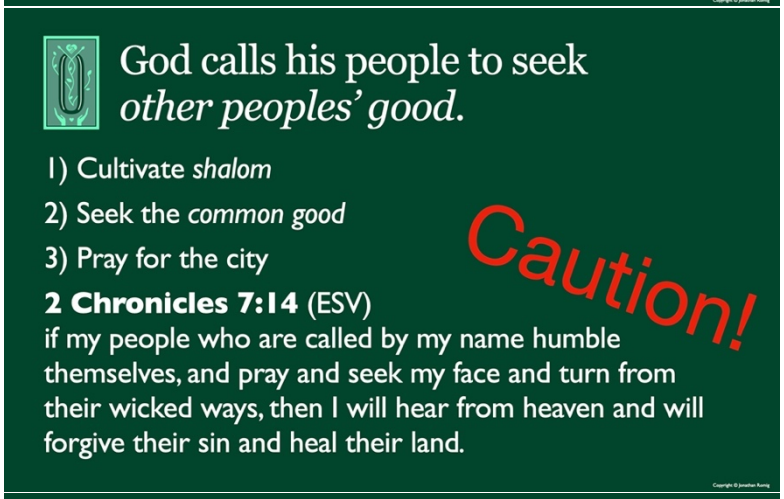
1) Cultivate shalom
2) Seek the common good
3) Pray for the city
2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)
if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Slide 23


God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
1) Cultivate shalom
2) Seek the common good
3) Pray for the city
Caution!
2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)
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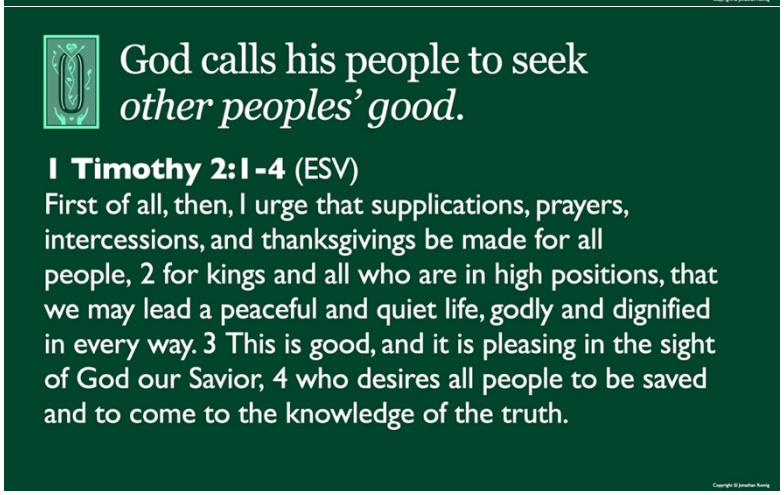
Slide 24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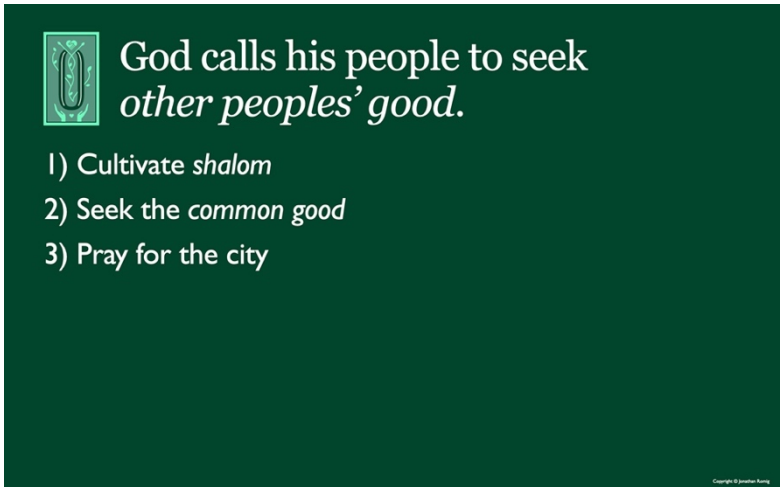

God calls his people to seek
other peoples' good.
1) Cultivate shalom
2) Seek the common good
3) Pray for the city

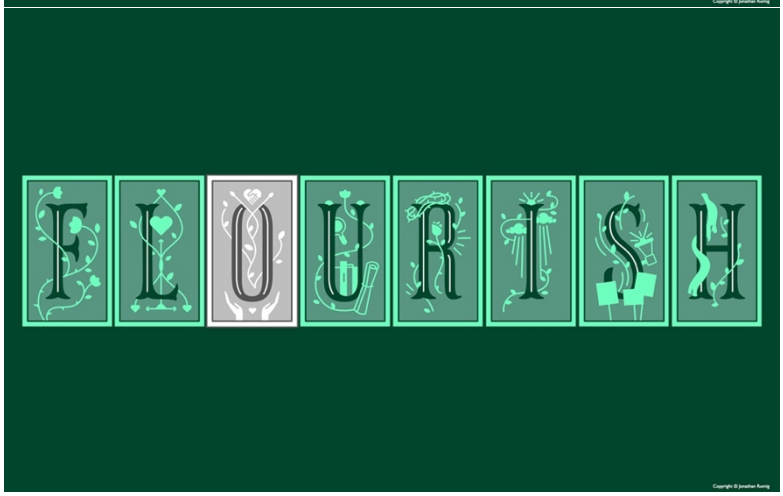
#4 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

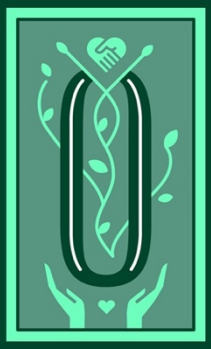
Slide 3



Slide 4

What's one word you would use to describe how you feel about politics today?

Slide 5



How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us hope in political chaos?

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Slide 6

How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us hope in political chaos?

Genesis 1:28 (ESV)
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

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Slide 7

How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us hope in political chaos?

Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ESV)
4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

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Slide 8

Genesis 1		Jeremiah 29	
Void & Chaos	Order & Beauty	War & Exile	Shalom of City

How do Genesis and Jeremiah give us hope in political chaos?

Slide 9

The webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight — a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 10.

What is shalom and why does it matter?

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Slide 10

Slide 11

In the summer of 2014, the managers, employees, and customers of a New England chain of supermarkets called Market Basket joined together to oppose the board of directors' decision earlier that year to oust the chain's popular chief executive, Arthur T. Demoulas. Their demonstrations and boycotts emptied most of the chain's seventy stores. What had been special about Arthur T, as he was known, was his approach to business. He kept prices lower than his competitors, paid his employees more, and gave them and his managers more authority to make decisions. Just before he was ousted he offered customers an additional 4 percent discount, arguing they could make better use of the money than the shareholders could. Arthur T viewed Market Basket as a joint enterprise from which everyone should benefit, not just its shareholders—which was why the board fired him. Yet eventually consumers and employees won. The boycott was so costly that the board sold the company to Arthur T.

Robert B. Reich, *The Common Good* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018) 125-126, Kindle.

How is this author's illustration of the common good similar or different to our biblical understanding?

Slide 12

Well, what I'm trying to do in our letter exchanges is to help you approach American politics and public life in a way that resists idolizing any one good, whether that be individual freedom, cultural heritage, material prosperity, or national and ethnic identity. I'm trying to help you construct a political paradigm that recognizes God's sovereignty over our nation, draws on our Christianity to work for the common good, and respects the dignity and rights of citizens who have differing visions of the common good.

Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 7, Kindle.

Slide 13

Some point to a polarization and fragmentation in society that goes far beyond the usual political partisanship. There is a growing tribalism that reveals a culture in which there is a vacated center, a loss of any shared idea of common public good. There is a profound loss of social trust that appears to be undermining all the institutions that have held our society together.

Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (New York: Viking, 2021) xvii, Kindle.

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Slide 14

"The way Christians work toward human flourishing is not by imposing on others their vision of human flourishing and the common good but by bearing witness to Christ, who embodies the good life…"

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) Intro., Kindle.

Do you agree, disagree? How might Christians use politics to further our vision of flourishing? Should we force it?

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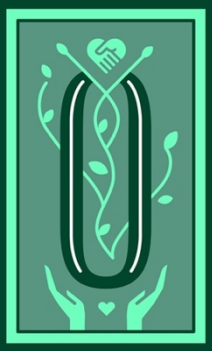
Slide 15



How is the church a "counterculture for the common good?"

(See Timothy Keller's sermon by the same name)

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Slide 16

Acts 2

How is the church a "counterculture for the common good?"

Slide 17

The church is that gathering of Christian believers for worship, preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and corporate discipleship. And the church is also that same body of Christian believers sent out into the whole of the world to bear witness to Christ in every sphere of life. Another way of talking about this is through the rhythms of breathing in and breathing out: the church exists both by "breathing in" (gathered within the church building) and "breathing out" (sent into the world), in a regular weekly rhythm. A living church is gathered and sent, breathing in and out.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 1, Kindle.

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Slide 18

It is the role of the gathered church to disciple Christian believers to be responsible and engaged citizens. But it is the role of the sent church to debate and endorse specific political platforms and candidates. The gathered church cannot shy away from preaching the comprehensiveness of the gospel, even when it means touching on controversial and debated public issues (otherwise these questions are left in the hands of unformed, undiscipled Christians with little to no Scriptural guidance), and the sent church must embody and unfold the comprehensive application of the gospel in all of life.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 5, Kindle.

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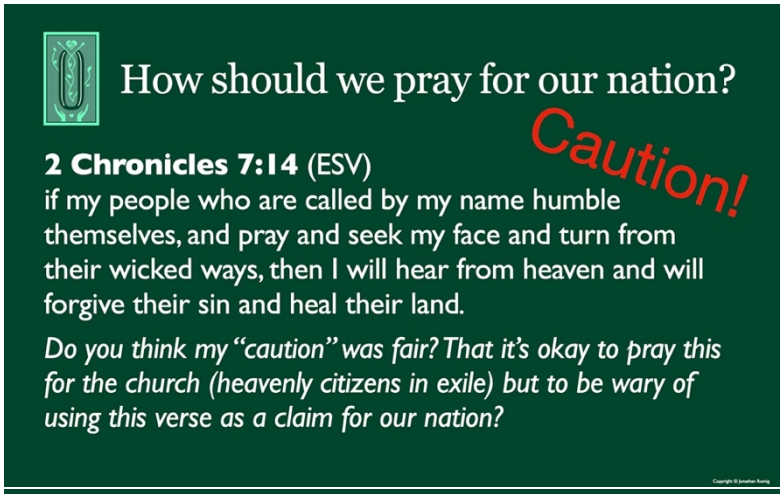
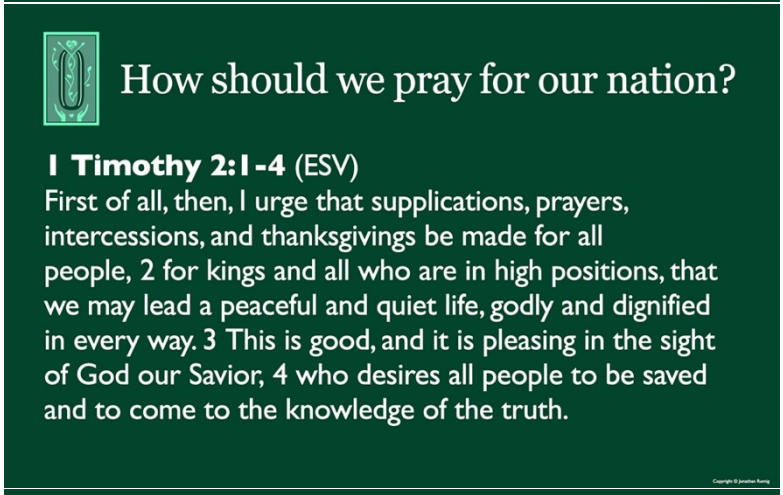
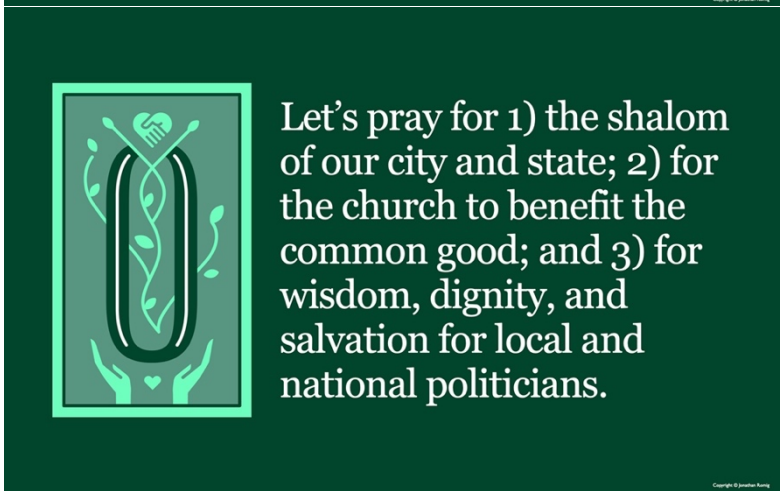
Slide 19


How should we pray for our nation?
Caution!
2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)
if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.
Do you think my "caution" was fair? That it's okay to pray this for the church (heavenly citizens in exile) but to be wary of using this verse as a claim for our nation?

Slide 20


How should we pray for our nation?
1 Timothy 2:1-4 (ESV)
First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Slide 21


Let's pray for 1) the shalom of our city and state; 2) for the church to benefit the common good; and 3) for wisdom, dignity, and salvation for local and national politicians.

Proverbs 8:15-17; James 3:13-18

Faith & Flourishing in Politics: Understanding & Wisdom

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / October 31st, 2021

(S1) I'm a low-level sci-fi nerd. One of my favorite action movies is the *Matrix*. The *Matrix* is a movie about everyone being stuck in a computer-generated world and having to break free to the real post-apocalyptic world outside. **(S2)** In the Matrix Trilogy, there's a scene where Neo, the hero of the movie played by Keanu Reeves, gets stuck in a subway station. This subway station is where people and programs secretly travel between the real world and the computer-generated world, the matrix.

The name of the subway station is "Mobil Ave," which is an anagram for "Limbo."[1] When Neo gets sent to the limbo train station, he tries to get out by running down the tracks. But it takes him right back to where he began. If he were to run down those train tracks a hundred times, it would take him back to where he started a hundred times. Even if he turned around and ran in the other direction, he'd end in the same spot.

Neo cannot travel from the computer world to the real world or the other way, no matter how hard he might try. That's kind of where we are in our series, in limbo. God gives us a vision of flourishing in Genesis 1and invites us to seek it, but the fall in Genesis 3 hinders us. Maybe all your life, you've run down those subway tracks, worked hard, voted hard, cared, only to end up back at limbo station.

In this series, we're trying to get out of limbo station. We're trying to work towards the flourishing God intended for our world, using the word "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." as an acronym: **(S3>)**

> F – Faith, Not Fear – We talked about not allowing fear to drive our politics, but faithful presence.
> L – Love God & Neighbor – We talked about our faith shaping our politics and the Good Samaritan.
> O – Other Peoples' Good – We talked about biblical concepts like shalom and the common good.

One of the reasons I want this acronym to be memorable is that when you think about politics with a friend or go to vote, you can remember some of the Bible's principles for political engagement. But that doesn't mean it's going to be easy. How are we supposed to exit limbo to find God's flourishing in the real world outside? What policies and politicians can best achieve shalom and the common good?

(S4) There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies & politicians.

The Bible gives Christians a sense of what God's flourishing looks like. On your left, we have Biblical shalom and the common good; and on the right, we have public policy. But how do we

get from our vision for flourishing to making it a reality when there's a gap between them? How do I know there's a gap?

a. (S5) The Bible is not a public policy manual.

Just like the Bible is not a science textbook, it is not a public policy manual. God gives his special covenant nation Israel laws and ordinances to follow in the Old Testament. And in the New Testament, Jesus gives his followers a new ethic to live by, the Sermon on the Mount. But God's word does more than just tell us how to live; it exposes our hearts.

> **(S6) Hebrews 4:12** (ESV)
> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to expose our idols and insecurities and apply his love. God desires to reveal our idols within our politics so that we can love him more. He won't let false idols take his place. Do we come to scripture looking for it to confirm our political opinions or to expose our hearts?

Several years ago, I tried to sit down and write a book explaining the Biblical position on modern-political issues like abortion, immigration, homosexuality, gun control, and more. I was going to call it *The Political Platform of Jesus Christ*. Great idea, right? Just vote whatever the Bible says. It turns out the Bible was not written with my modern-American political issues in mind.[2] The Bible isn't a textbook for American politics.

Several authors have written books like these, examining specific political topics from scripture, and I respect them for their effort. Still, it's so easy for a book like that to turn into the Bible's defense of a political party or platform. While the Bible may offer insights about abortion, immigration, homosexuality, taxation, and gun control, it doesn't tell us how to apply God's truth to public policy. The Bible tells us the lives of the pre-born, the elderly, black people, and every marginalized person has immense worth. The Bible doesn't tell us which policies best protect those lives or foster their flourishing. *It's not a policy manual*.

b. (S7) The Bible endorses humility and wisdom, not politicians.

Every election cycle, there are always candidates who claim to be the Christian candidate. They might quote Bible verses or show up at prayer breakfasts, but the Bible does not endorse them no matter how Christian they claim to be. Instead, the Bible endorses a heart-attitude of wisdom.

> **(S8) James 3:13-18** (ESV)
> 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits,

impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Scripture endorses heavenly wisdom that demonstrates good conduct, is meek, is humble, pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, merciful, bears good fruit, and is impartial and sincere. But bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, boasting, and falsehoods all display foolishness. Have we ever applauded those characteristics in a politician because they affirm our position? Heavenly wisdom produces peace, the closest New Testament word we have to "shalom," but foolishness falls short. *The Bible endorses wisdom, not politicians*.

In college, I volunteered for a congressional candidate to get extra credit in my political science class. No matter how much I liked her or went door to door reminding people to vote for her or how many signs I waved for her, she was my candidate, not the Bible's. *There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies and politicians*. Mind the gap! So how do we get across? Do we bridge the gap with political ideologies, just do whatever my party says? How about news soundbites? We can't just proof-text policies from the Bible. So what are we to do? How do we get from our vision of flourishing to specific policies?

(S9) Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.

Wisdom helps get out of the subway limbo station and into the real world. Wisdom, which is complex and requires time and effort, helps politicians and us set good public policies. Proverbs defines wisdom:

> **(S10) Proverbs 1:7** (ESV)
> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
> fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Fear of God is different than fear of man. Fear of man leads to fighting, fleeing, fusion, or freaking out. But the fear of God, meaning respect and awe for who he is, leads to flourishing. Here's how we define it:

> **(S11)** What is wisdom? It's a capacity of mind that combines the fear of the Lord with the skill of living in God's created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing.[3] – *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* by Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli

Wisdom is skillfully navigating our world to create justice, shalom, and flourishing. Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy. The Bible gives us a vision of flourishing. It tells us some things that are wrong. Thou shalt not steal or murder (Exodus 20:13, 15). But in general, the Bible doesn't say how to stop those things. Proverbs encourages us to be especially mindful of the most vulnerable, including the poor, widows, and orphans but doesn't say how to do that (c.f., James 1:27).

> **(S12) Proverbs 29:7** (ESV)
> A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
> a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

(S13) Proverbs 15:25 (ESV)
The Lord tears down the house of the proud
but maintains the widow's boundaries.

(S14) Proverbs 23:10-11 (ESV)
Do not move an ancient landmark
or enter the fields of the fatherless,
for their Redeemer is strong;
he will plead their cause against you.

A flourishing community takes care of the poor, widows, and orphans, but the Bible doesn't say how exactly to do that. Should we create a social safety net for them or try to offer more jobs? That's where wisdom (not partisanship) bridges the gap.[4] Wisdom helps set policies that help the needy without hurting them or others. Wisdom is not simple, easy, or sometimes even expected.

(S15) There's an interesting story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who resisted Hitler during WWII. The day France fell to Germany, Bonhoeffer was sitting in a public café with his friend when the German victory was announced throughout the city. The friend describes what happened next:

> The people around the tables could hardly contain themselves; they jumped up, and some even climbed on the chairs. With outstretched arms, they sang *"Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles"* ("Germany, Germany above all") and the Horse Wessel song (the Nazi's anthem). We stood up, too Bonhoeffer raised his arm in the regulation Hitler salute, while I stood there dazed. "Raise your arm! Are you crazy?" he whispered to me, and later: "We shall have to run risks for very different things now, but not for that salute!"[5]

In that moment, surrounded by crowds of cheering, patriotic Germans, Bonhoeffer had to decide whether to stay seated and risk being arrested and thrown in prison or pretend to celebrate something he did not affirm for the sake of resisting later. What does wisdom say? Was Bonhoeffer wrong or wise? *Wisdom helps bridge the gap between flourishing and policy*. It doesn't solve everything, which is why we need understanding.

a. (S16) Wisdom takes time to listen and understand, then act.

Foolishness and uninformed decisions are the opposite of wisdom. Those who are foolish make snap decisions and do not care what others think, but the wise listen and learn.

(S17) Proverbs 1:5 (ESV)
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,

Listening and understanding take mental and emotional energy. It's much easier and quicker to create boxes, my political party, which is good, versus their political party, which is bad.[6] Thus, I don't have to think about what others are saying. They must be wrong because they're not on "my side." But I've recently heard it said, "Curiosity is the new humility."[7] When we show genuine curiosity about people and policies and try to understand them, it shows humility.

Let's pretend for a moment your doorbell ringing wakes you up in the middle of the night. You open your door and find two people there, a Democrat and a Republican. The one you disagree with the most politically grabs your shoulder and exclaims, "Your house is on fire!" But at that moment, the one you like the most jumps in and declares, "No, it's not! Go back to bed!" What would you do? Would you go back to bed? Of course not! You'd make sure your house was not on fire. You would listen, understand, and act.

Wisdom takes time to listen and understand, then act. Wisdom recognizes that it needs to be careful not to misrepresent the other side. To misrepresent what the other side is actually saying is to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). Wise people represent those they disagree with well. We need wise voters and leaders.

b. (S18) Wise leaders help a nation flourish.

The book of proverbs repeatedly talks about the need for wise rulers. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as a woman. She says this about kings and governors.

> **(S19) Proverbs 8:15-17** (ESV)
> 15 By me kings reign,
> and rulers decree what is just;
> 16 by me princes rule,
> and nobles, all who govern justly.
> 17 I love those who love me,
> and those who seek me diligently find me.

Having rulers in power who fear the Lord, and seek to do justice and rule wisely, is good for the people. King Solomon once had two prostitutes approach him. They each had a child, but one of them had accidentally caused the death of her child during the night, and she had gotten up and swapped hers with the other woman's child. When that woman awoke, she knew the child wasn't hers and that the woman had stolen hers. But nobody knew which woman was right. So king Solomon called for a sword and said he would cut the child in half and give a portion to each. The one who wasn't the child's mother agreed, but the true mother said the other woman could take her child. That's what a true mother would do.

> **(S20) 1 Kings 3:28** (ESV)
> 28 And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

Wise leaders help create good policies. Solomon demonstrated God-given wisdom. Does this mean that non-Christians who don't fear the Lord cannot display wisdom? No. They may still show a measure of wisdom as they prioritize the common good and govern society according to how God made the world. On the other side, some politicians might claim to be Christians and even quote scripture, but they're acting quite foolishly and using scripture for "selfish ambition." Sometimes it's the person who is not making a show of their faith, who if you look at their past decisions, shows more wisdom.

I watched a politics and Christians panel where Chuck Colson talked about how difficult it was at the highest levels of public office. He worked in the Nixon administration before committing

Watergate. He said that there is not much black and white at the highest levels of government but many shades of gray. Every decision has a myriad of unintended side-effects in a myriad of unintended places. Our government needs leaders with wisdom, and as Christians, we can pray that God would give them understanding and wisdom.

There is a gap between biblical flourishing and actual policies. Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.

(S21) Jesus embodies wisdom and grants wisdom to those who seek it.

Jesus took on every aspect of God's character, including wisdom, and became flesh.

> **(S22) 1 Corinthians 1:30** (ESV)
> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

No matter how much understanding we acquire and how wise we become, we're going to fall short. "Knowledge puffs up."[8] We'll vote for policies that love some neighbors and hurt others. We're going to put politicians into office who demonstrate more foolishness than wisdom. But God forgives us.

God forgives us because he became wisdom for us.[9] The Son of God stepped down into our world, took on human flesh, and embodied wisdom. Jesus always made the wisest choices. He never failed, neither politically nor in any way. He was full of wisdom and did justice better than Solomon or any other ruler. He died to pay the penalty for our foolishness and rose to grant us the righteousness and wisdom of God.

Now you and I can know God and develop true wisdom for walking through this world. And now Jesus is seated on the throne in heaven, ruling and reigning over the entire cosmos with perfect understanding and wisdom. Wisdom begins by confessing our foolishness and choosing to trust in Jesus, and then we pray:

> **(S23) James 1:5** (ESV)
> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Let's pray that God would make us into wise people. But that takes curiosity. As one pastor says, "Don't just be a headline reader. Be educated. Learn. Go deep."[10] Seek understanding as you ask for God's wisdom. May we become wise people who support policies that help our world flourish. *Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy. Jesus embodies wisdom and will grant his wisdom to those who seek it.*

Another one of my favorite movies is *Groundhog Day*. Bill Murray plays this selfish awful reporter who gets trapped in the same day over and over again. He does anything he wants and lives selfishly for a long time. But eventually, he begins to pursue the common good. He begins to care about others. He begins to save lives and learns how to play the piano. And finally, that's what gets him out of his time loop. Somehow instead of repeating the same mistakes over and

over again, he starts thinking about others and caring for them. He begins demonstrating wisdom and cultivating flourishing, and that's what gets him out of limbo and to a new day. *Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.*

> *Benediction* – **Jude 24-25** (NIV)
> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my fifth sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *Understanding & Wisdom*. Here are several follow-up items to reflect on during the week:

Pray: James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (ESV) Let's take some time and ask God for wisdom. Ask God to develop the fear of the Lord in you and to give you wisdom (skill) for navigating life and politics.

Listen (sermon): I'm sharing this sermon from Pastor Jon Tyson called *The Controversial Jesus – Jesus and Politics* because it demonstrates wisdom and communicates a great deal of understanding. Pastor Tyson is very thorough in his sermons and includes a great deal of historical research, clearly a strength of his. He also offers a unique perspective as he was not born in America. YouTube: https://youtu.be/1En37ldKvlU (1:07 minutes).[11] This is probably my second favorite sermon on politics.

Listen (panel): Listen to Krista Tippett moderate a fascinating discussion on Christians and politics between Chuck Colson, Gregory Boyd, and Shane Claiborne. Colson worked in the Nixon administration and became a follower of Christ before being sentenced to prison. Boyd is a pastor who preached on politics in the 90s and lost 20% of his church (1,000 members). And Shane Claiborne founded a counter-cultural community trying to live the way of Jesus. Each has written on God and politics. By listening to the different perspectives, I hope we will develop greater understanding and wisdom as we navigate politics today. YouTube: https://youtu.be/7Ky32FX03GA (1:32 minutes).[12]

Journal: Write a list of 3-5 political issues that matter to you. Ask the Lord if there is an item or two on your list you need to investigate more thoroughly, especially the opposing political viewpoint. What does he tell you? How is he calling you to grow in your understanding and wisdom? How might you represent the issue well, even if you do take a particular viewpoint?

Worship: Listen to Shane and Shane's worship song *Psalm 51 (Wisdom in the Secret Heart)*. YouTube: https://youtu.be/px-eU1QjQiU.

Read (advanced): If you want to dive deeper into wisdom's role in politics, you can pick up the challenging yet worthwhile book, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics,* by Robert Benne (2010, 128 pages). Benne is a Lutheran theologian and offers a pathway for the complex relationship between Christians, their churches, and political issues today. Available on Kindle and paperback.

I hope these resources help us grow in understanding and wisdom.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. I am looking forward to next week's Christian Ed. I'm going to present some models that explain the gap between Biblical flourishing and policies that I hope will make for some good discussion.

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1. "Mobil Avenue," The Matrix Wiki, accessed October 21, 2021 https://matrix.fandom.com/wiki/Mobil_Avenue.

2. "Lecture on the Early Church & Politics: Tim Mackie (The Bible Project)," Tim Mackie Archives, YouTube, published August 15, 2017, accessed October 21, 2021 https://youtu.be/wXcSJVW8rg4.

3. Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 14, Kindle.

4. See Timothy Keller, "How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don't," The New York Times, September 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/29/opinion/sunday/christians-politics-belief.html.

5. "The Turning Point for Dietrich Bonhoeffer," bonhoefferblog, published January 19, 2016, accessed October 21, 2021 https://bonhoefferblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/6296/, quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945," Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 16, published June 12, 2006, 1-2. I added translation and explanation of songs. Thank you Pastor Alex Burgess for telling me about this story.

6. Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 30, Kindle.

7. Chris Lake, "Curiosity is the New Humility," published October 25, 2021, accessed October 25, 2021 https://cornerstonewestford.com/2021/10/25/curiosity-is-the-new-humility/.

8. 1 Corinthians 8:1b (ESV).

9. Proverbs 8:22-23; Matthew 11:19; Luke 2:40; Colossians 1:15-20.

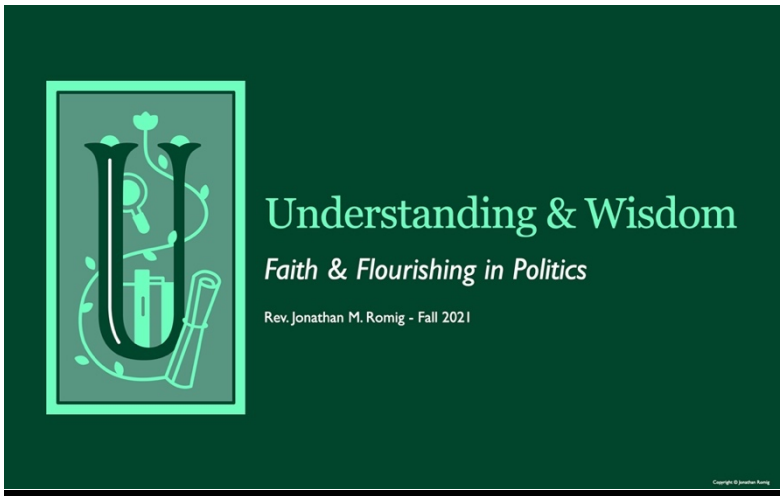
10. Eugene Cho, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2020) 142, Kindle.

11. "The Controversial Jesus - Jesus and Politics - Jon Tyson," Church of the City New York, YouTube, published May 28, 2018, accessed October 27, 2021 https://youtu.be/1En37ldKvlU.

12. "Christians in Politics Debate - Greg Boyd, Shane Claiborne, and Chuck Colson," Third Way, YouTube, published October 19, 2014, accessed October 27, 2021 https://youtu.be/7Ky32FX03GA.

#5 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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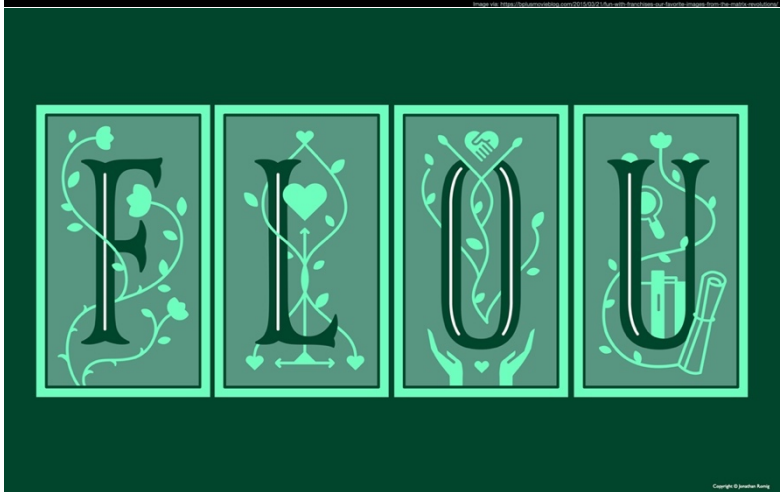

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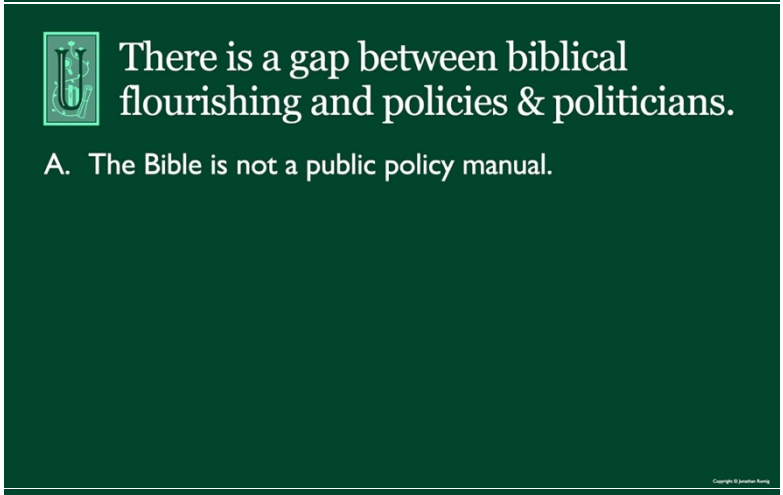

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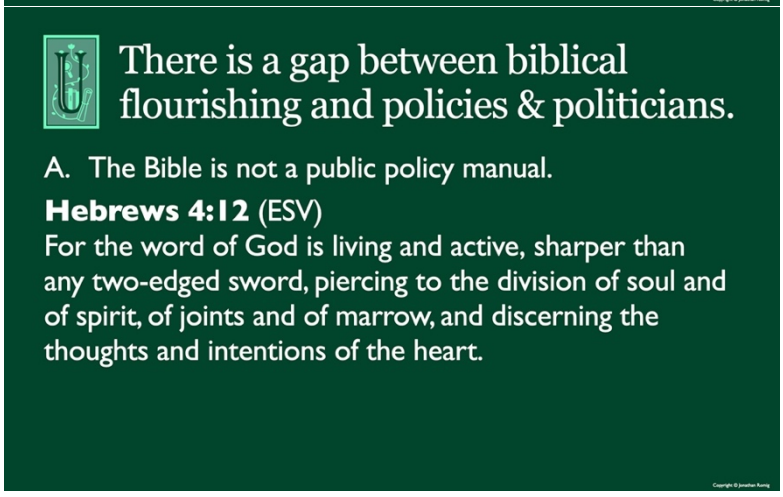
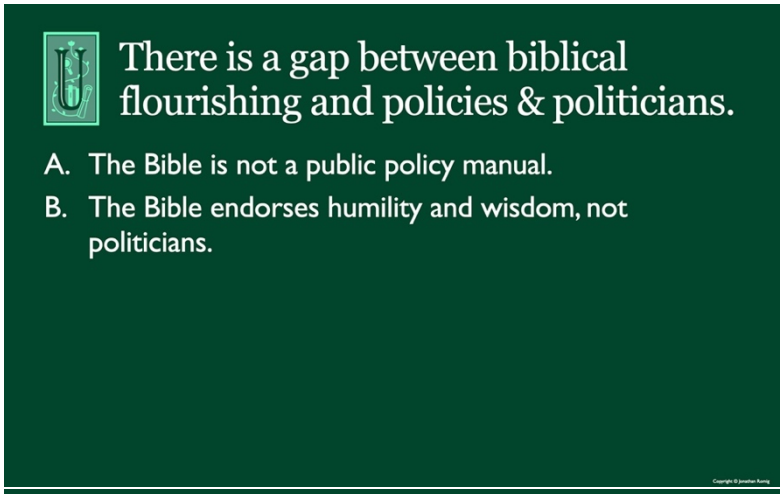
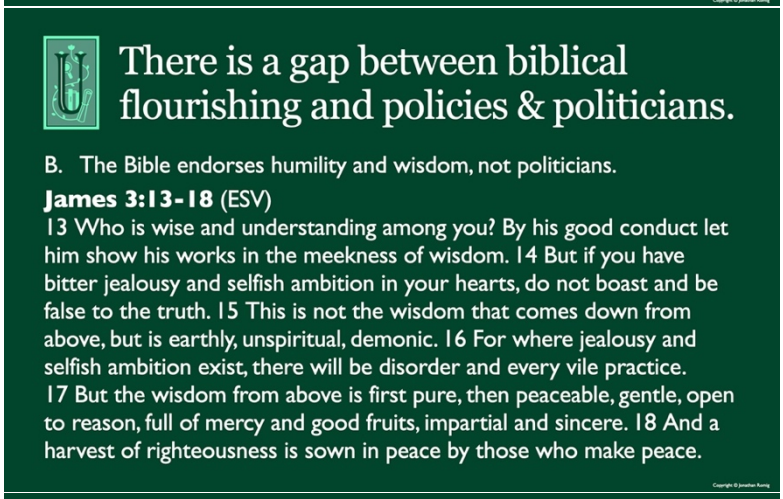

There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies & politicians.
A. The Bible is not a public policy manual.
Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)
For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Slide 7


There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies & politicians.
A. The Bible is not a public policy manual.
B. The Bible endorses humility and wisdom, not politicians.

Slide 8


There is a gap between biblical flourishing and policies & politicians.
B. The Bible endorses humility and wisdom, not politicians.
James 3:13-18 (ESV)
13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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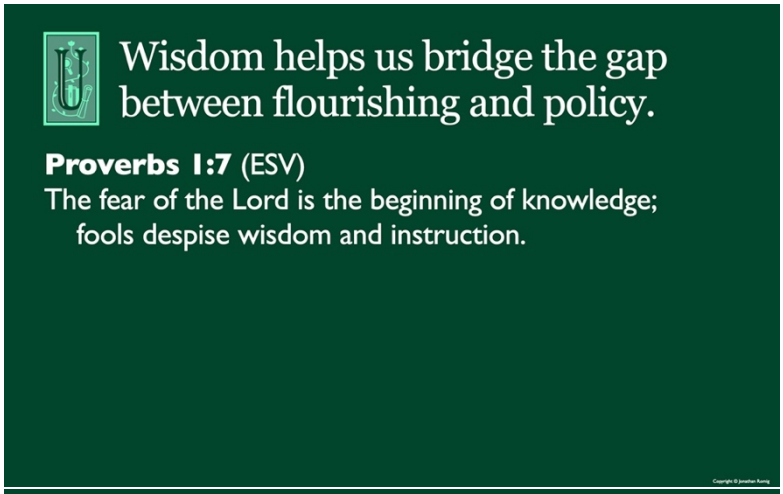
Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
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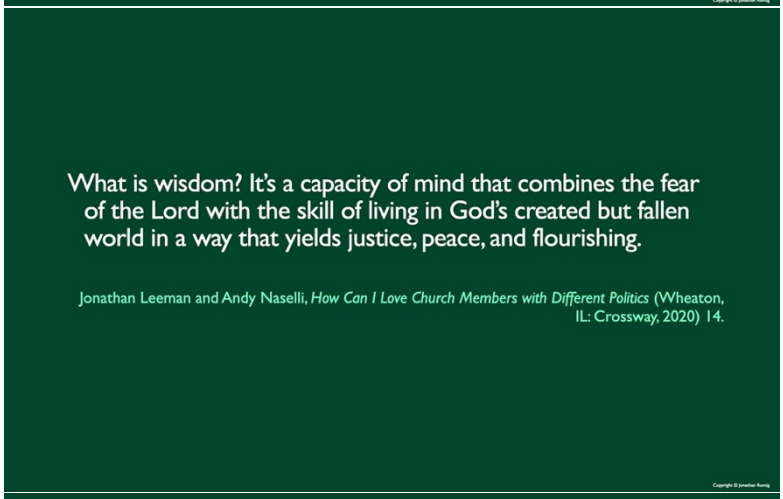
What is wisdom? It's a capacity of mind that combines the fear of the Lord with the skill of living in God's created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing.
Jonathan Leeman and Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020) 14.
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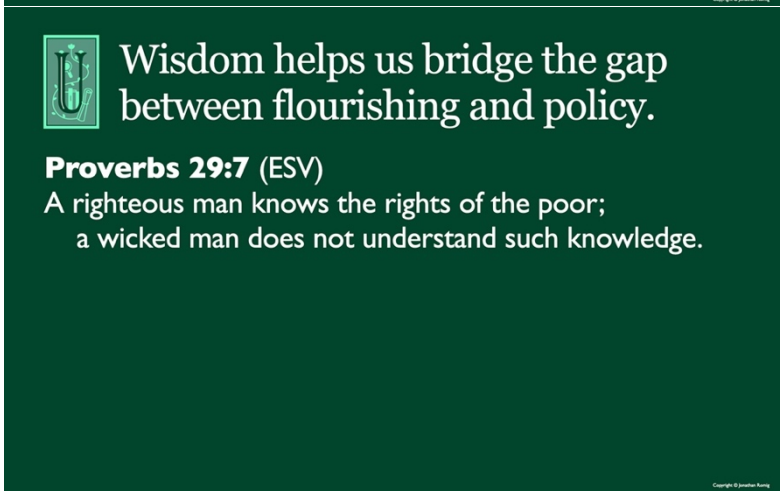
Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
Proverbs 29:7 (ESV)
A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.
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Slide 13

Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.

Proverbs 15:25 (ESV)
The Lord tears down the house of the proud
but maintains the widow's boundaries.

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Slide 14

Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.

Proverbs 23:10-11 (ESV)
Do not move an ancient landmark
or enter the fields of the fatherless,
for their Redeemer is strong;
he will plead their cause against you.

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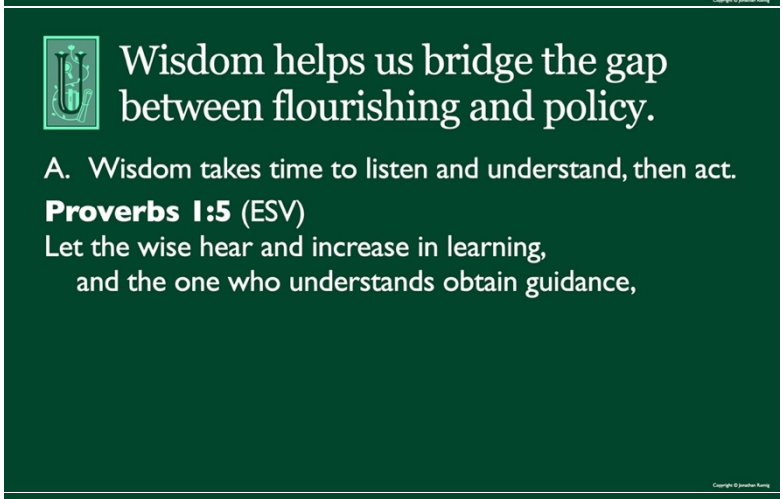
Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
A. Wisdom takes time to listen and understand, then act.
Proverbs 1:5 (ESV)
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,

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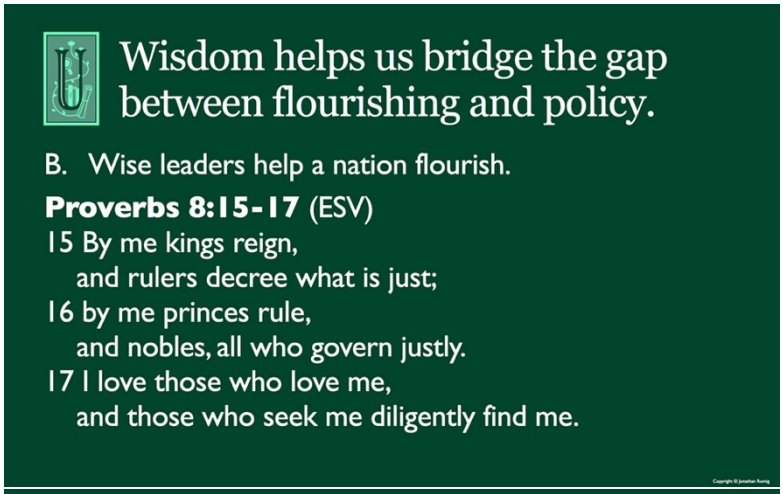
Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
A. Wisdom takes time to listen and understand, then act.
B. Wise leaders help a nation flourish.

Slide 19


Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
B. Wise leaders help a nation flourish.
Proverbs 8:15-17 (ESV)
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me princes rule,
and nobles, all who govern justly.
17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.

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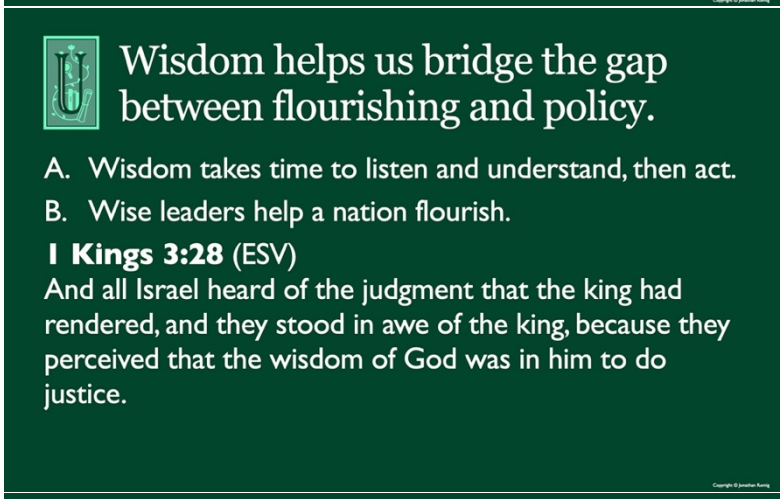
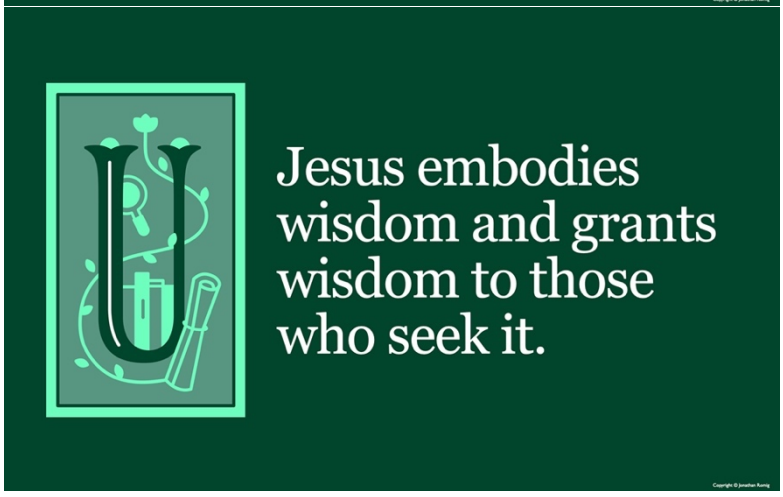

Wisdom helps us bridge the gap between flourishing and policy.
A. Wisdom takes time to listen and understand, then act.
B. Wise leaders help a nation flourish.
1 Kings 3:28 (ESV)
And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

Slide 21



Slide 22

Jesus embodies wisdom and grants wisdom to those who seek it.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)
And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

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James 1:5 (ESV)
If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

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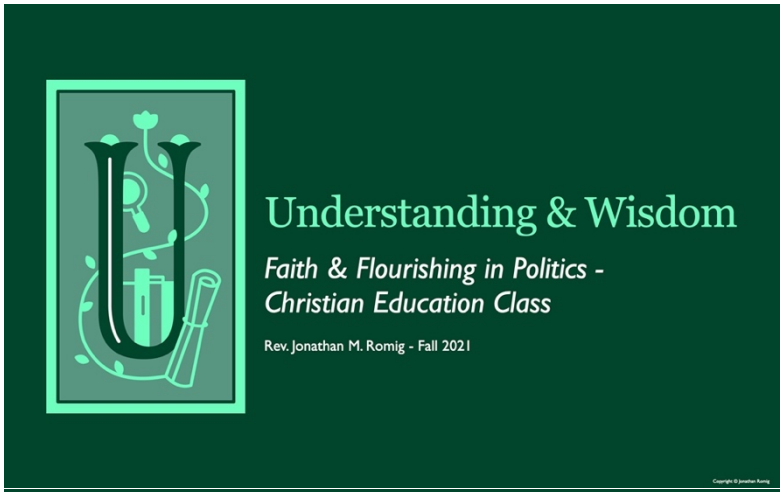
Slide 24

#5 Christian Education Slides

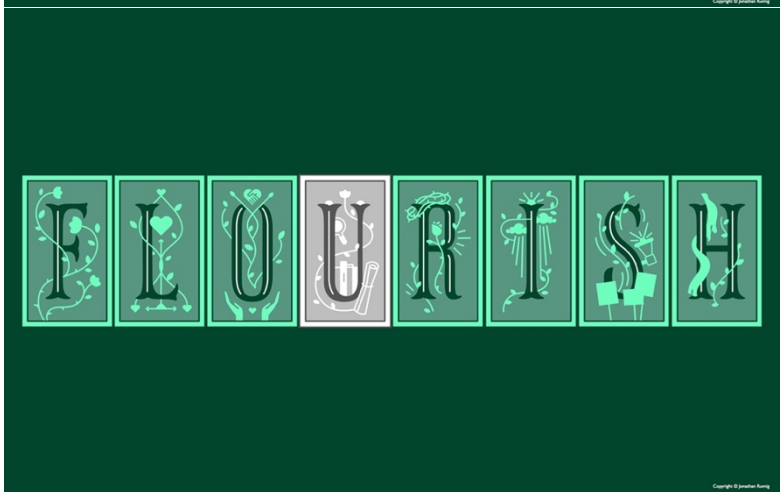
Slide 1



Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation, silently while we discuss, and to get the class started. We need the Holy Spirit!

Slide 3



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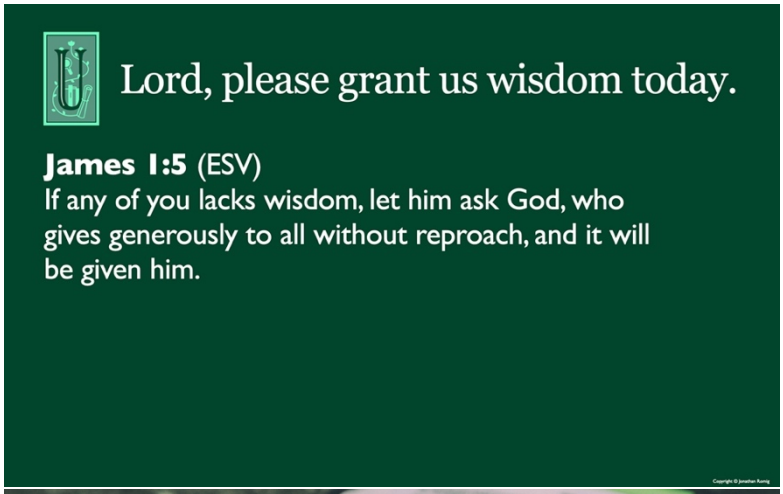
Lord, please grant us wisdom today.
James 1:5 (ESV)
If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

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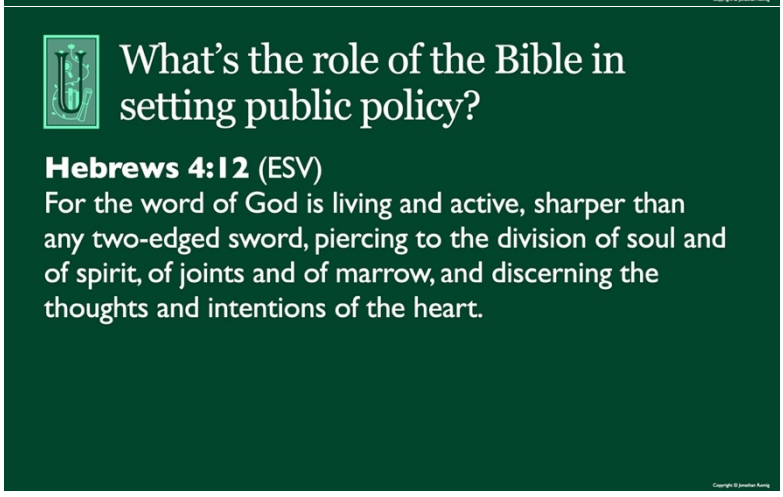
What's the role of the Bible in setting public policy?
Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)
For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Slide 7

What's the role of the Bible in setting public policy?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)
All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

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Slide 8

The Bible will give us essential principles as well as attitudes or dispositions to keep in our minds and hearts as we advocate for and implement particular public policies. But the exact nature of those public policies depends on a host of factors that are connected to the specific concrete historical situation at the time.

To implement the biblical principles relevant to public policy, therefore, requires a knowledge not only of the principles themselves, but also the situation at the moment the policies are being developed, as well as the people involved. The ability to apply the right principle in a way appropriate to a particular situation is what the Bible calls "wisdom."

Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 66, Kindle.

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Slide 9

James 3:13-18 (ESV)
13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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Image by klimkin from Pixabay: https://pixabay.com/photos/flower-life-yellow-flower-crack-887443/

What is wisdom and why does it matter for politics?

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Slide 11

What is wisdom? It's a capacity of mind that combines the fear of the Lord with the skill of living in God's created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing.

Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 14, Kindle.

Correspondingly, Christian wisdom in one sense is that faith itself—an overarching interpretation of reality, a set of convictions, attitudes, and practices that direct people in living their lives well. Here "living well" means living as God created human beings to live, rather than living against the grain of their own true reality and the reality of the world. Wisdom in this sense is an integrated way of life that enables the flourishing of persons, communities, and all creation.

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 101.

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Slide 12

Political judgments depend on figuring out how to apply our biblical and ethical principles to the vast and complex set of circumstances that surround every political decision. They account for social dynamics, legal precedents, political feasibility, historical factors, economic projections, ethnic tensions, criminal-justice considerations, and so much more. People today often treat their votes as personal expressions of who they are. Yet we would encourage you to view votes less as matters of self-expression or tribal identification and more as strategic calculations concerning these kinds of non-biblical matters. Then recognize that different Christians will make different wisdom-based calculations.

Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 15-16, Kindle.

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How can wisdom help bridge the gap between biblical flourishing and public policy?

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Slide 14

"In short, a whole-church issue depends on straight-line judgments, while a Christian-freedom issue depends on jagged line-judgments. By saying whole-church matters depend on straight-line judgments, we mean that there is a simple straight line between a theological or ethical principle found in the Bible and a political conviction."

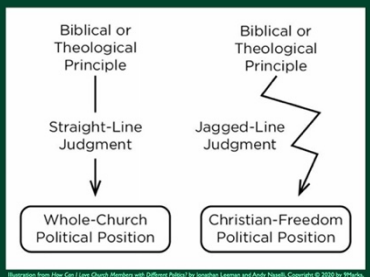

Illustration from *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* by Jonathan Leeman and Andy Naselli, Copyright © 2020 by 9Marks, pp. 25-26. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org

Question: What political positions do you think are more straight-line or jagged line?

Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 25-26, Kindle. crossway.org

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"Those [core theological] beliefs are the common ground for all Christians, and provide their crucial identity. They point to ultimate truth for believers, and serious Christians stake their lives upon that belief. Moreover, those central convictions do not change radically over time, though their articulation and interpretation must be re-done for every new generation. They are the treasure of the church, whose main mission it is to proclaim and teach them to the world."

Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) chap. 4, Kindle.

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Slide 16

"They are principles derived from the core that are addressed to challenges before the church. As the church faces challenges through time a body of social teaching is built up. . . . For example, the social teaching on abortion is long-lived and extensive. Catholic consciences are to be formed by the social teachings of the church. Other churches have developed social teachings, but rarely as authoritative or as persuasive as those of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church's teachings do change over time, but very slowly."

Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) chap. 4, Kindle.

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Slide 17

"Most Christians have at their disposal the "theory of just war" that has been in the Christian tradition since St. Augustine. They use that theory as a common starting point, assuming that it is consistent with the core commitments of the faith. However, while many theological ethicists come to the conclusion that the Iraq War was not justified by that theory, others claim it was. . . . The movement from core to public policy, even when it draws upon common teaching such as the just war theory, does not move clearly to one public policy position. Room must be allowed for Christians of good will and intelligence to disagree."

Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) chap. 4, Kindle.

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Slide 18

"The final circle is concrete public policy itself, which is the product for the most part of the executive and legislative branches of government. Good public policy is notoriously difficult to craft, because it often has unintended results that can produce just the opposite effects than what was intended. Public policy is also the product of much give and take, much compromise. Sometimes there are so many interests involved in the formation of the policy that it lacks coherence."

Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) chap. 4, Kindle.

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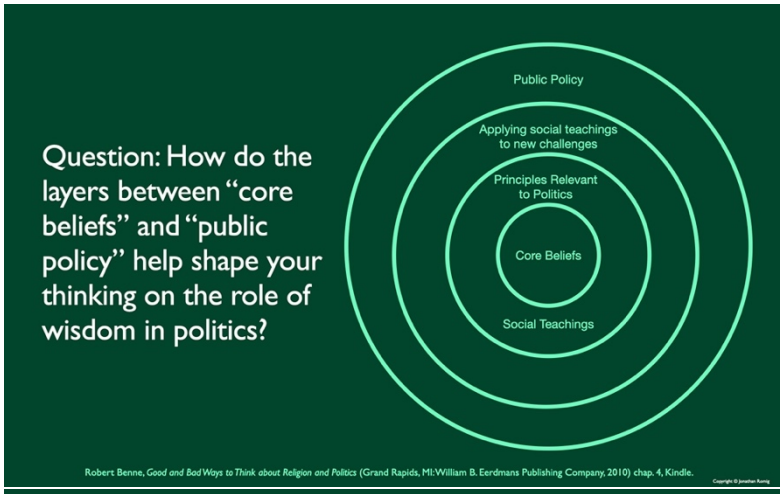
Question: How do the layers between "core beliefs" and "public policy" help shape your thinking on the role of wisdom in politics?
Public Policy
Applying social teachings to new challenges
Principles Relevant to Politics
Core Beliefs
Social Teachings
Robert Benne, Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics (Grand Rapids, MI:William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010) chap. 4, Kindle.

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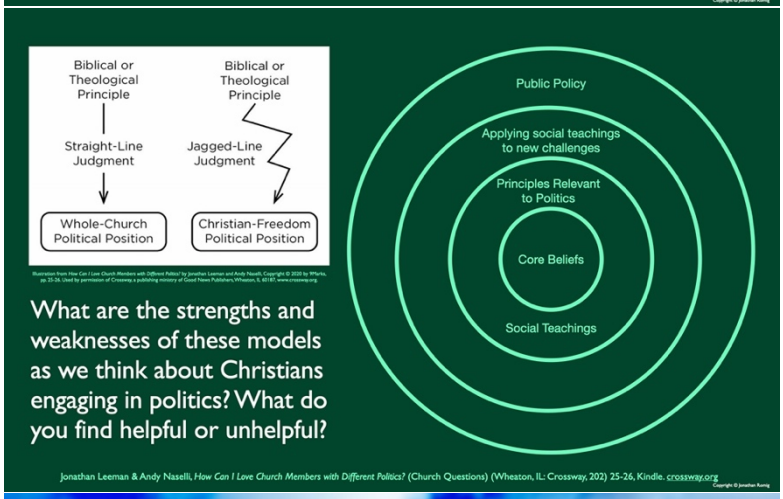
Biblical or Theological Principle
Straight-Line Judgment
Whole-Church Political Position
Biblical or Theological Principle
Jagged-Line Judgment
Christian-Freedom Political Position
What are the strengths and weaknesses of these models as we think about Christians engaging in politics? What do you find helpful or unhelpful?
Public Policy
Applying social teachings to new challenges
Principles Relevant to Politics
Core Beliefs
Social Teachings
Jonathan Leeman & Andy Naselli, How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics? (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 202) 25-26, Kindle. crossway.org

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Slide 22

The nation benefits from having leaders who are characterized by the kind of virtues highlighted by the book of Proverbs: humility, temperate speech and emotional expression, a desire for justice and fairness, an openness to listen to advice from wise advisors, a desire to protect the vulnerable, and more. . . .

. . . My point is that America is not a theocracy. While it was important for Israel to have a pious king (Deut. 17:14–20), Christians should not base their vote on whether a candidate has faith. But they should look for people who have practical and ethical wisdom that would enable them to put into place just and fair public policies that help their communities.

Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 71-72, Kindle.

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Image by Jonathan Romig

What does Jesus have to do with wisdom?

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Slide 24

1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)
And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

To reject wisdom as a way of life, or Christ as the embodiment of wisdom, is not like leaving the dessert untouched after a good meal; rather, it is like refusing the very nourishment without which human beings cannot truly flourish.

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) 102-103.

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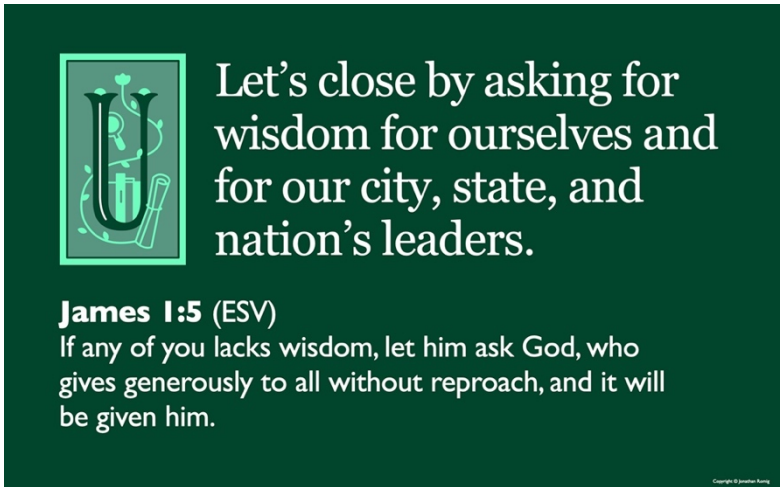
Slide 25


Let's close by asking for wisdom for ourselves and for our city, state, and nation's leaders.
James 1:5 (ESV)
If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Romans 13:1-7 & Philippians 3:20-21

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Reign of Christ

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / November 7th, 2021

(S1) I loved going to Awana club every week when I was a kid. If you're not familiar with this part of the Christian subculture, Awana is a weekly after-school program where once a week, kids gathered at church to eat snacks, play games, memorize Bible verses, and sing worship songs. And I loved it! One week when I thought I wasn't going to get to go, I had a major meltdown. I memorized so many verses I got my Sparky award and Timothy award. And I can only remember 2-3 verses today.

I'm grateful for my time in Awana and all it taught me. But looking back, there is something I question. But I'm not just picking on Awana. My experience provides a snapshot of a much bigger evangelical tension. At the beginning of every Awana club time, we would line up and parade the American flag, Awana flag, and Bible forward. I felt lucky if I got to hold a flag. The Awana flag code says to raise the national flag higher than the Awana flag.[1] With our hands on our hearts, we recited the pledge of allegiance.

> I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Then we'd pledge allegiance to the Awana flag and the Bible. Maybe we were trying to be like the school system. But I think as part of this sermon series, we need to ask ourselves an uncomfortable question. Is this appropriate? Raising the American flag, or any nation's higher, sends a message, doesn't it?

(S2) I walk into churches all the time that display an American flag and a Christian flag on the platform. U.S. flag code says that even in churches, the American flag must be displayed either higher than a church flag, or to its right, a place of "prominence."[2] What message does that send? Have you ever stopped and looked at a Christian flag? Have you ever noticed its colors? Red, white, and blue. God and country.

Is to be a good Christian to love God and country? I want to ask a question we need to answer, not from our personal preferences, but according to scripture. How are Christians supposed to relate to their country?

(S3) God calls us to submit to our government.

Our passage today twice talks about being "subject" to the government and recognizing it as a God-given authority in our lives.

> **(S4) Romans 13:1, 5** (ESV)
> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. . . . 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Paul is saying that God institutes every government for our good. This is amazing because Paul didn't write this under democratic rule but under the Roman government, which was more like a dictatorship. After Paul wrote this, Nero came along and burnt Christians at the stake. But still, Paul calls believers to be "subject to the governing authorities."

The Greek word for "subjection" is "hypotasso," which means subjection. To be subject to something is to recognize and abide by its authority. I got pulled over a month after getting my driver's license when I was sixteen. I submitted by getting my driver's license ready and giving it to the officer, recognizing his authority to ticket me. Thankfully, I only got a warning. I got a ticket in DC when I drove in the HOV lane a month after I'd moved there. I submitted by paying my ticket. If I'd refused to do either, God also gave the government the authority to punish me, or hold me in contempt, to "bear the sword." Submission involves recognizing God-given authority but does not necessarily mean obedience. That's a different Greek word.

Sometimes submission involves obedience, but sometimes submission involves humble and respectful disobedience. Paul showed compliance to Rome by submitting himself to their judgments, yet also calling on his rights and privileges as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29). Paul had to remind the government of its role to protect its citizens, and sometimes we do too. As believers, God calls us to accept the authority he has placed over us in government, which sometimes involves resistance and, other times, compliance.

> **(S5) Romans 13:6-7** (ESV)
> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

One of the best parts of having kids is deducting them on your taxes, right? I don't know anyone who likes paying taxes, but Paul says to pay the government. He doesn't say only to pay them if they use it on defense or education or if taxes are low. Instead, he says to pay what is owed. The government would have used these funds to pay Roman soldiers who abused Jews and Christians in Paul's time. Paying Roman taxes was controversial, more than it is today (Mark 12:13-17). believers go one step further. We respect and honor the government, not because we like Biden or Trump or the next President, but because we recognize what greater authority gives them their local authority. *God calls us to submit to the government.*

(S6) The government derives its authority from God's authority.

Let's look back at Romans 13:1-7 again: **(S7)**

- V1. "For there is not authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."
- V2. "Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed…"
- V4. "for (the government) is God's servant for your good… For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

(S8) Why did Napoleon crown himself instead of the Pope? Because he derived his authority from himself, not from the church. The Bible says God institutes all authorities, good and evil (1 Peter 2:13-16).

> **(S9) Daniel 2:21a** (ESV)
> He changes times and seasons;
> he removes kings and sets up kings;

God doesn't just leave kings to do what they want once in office but directs their hearts.

> **(S10) Proverbs 21:1** (ESV)
> The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;
> he turns it wherever he will.

But this is shocking because there have been a lot of bad governments in our world. Did God direct Mao to kill 70 million people? While God may institute governments, he never causes evil but can somehow, mysteriously, work through bad governments to bring about his plan. And so, we as Christians are called by God to submit to government, but that is different than obedience.

Sometimes we obey, like by paying taxes and abiding by laws, but if those laws or commandments ever contradict scripture, we obey God's laws instead of man's. For example, the government permits alcoholism, but while Christians can drink alcohol, we should not become alcoholics. How about much harder examples? The government permits self-defense, but Jesus says to love our enemies. What should we do? The government permits abortions, but scripture values life. What should we do?

When should we submit? When should we obey? And how should we love our country? Should we love God and country? According to scripture, to be a good Christian is to love God and submit to country. But our allegiance must belong to God and God alone.

(S11) Our total allegiance must belong to God and his kingdom.

Jesus taught his followers a prayer that reminded them of where their allegiance should be. It goes like this:

> **(S12) Matthew 6:9b-10** (ESV)
> "Our Father in heaven,
> hallowed be your name.
> Your kingdom come,
> your will be done,
> on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus didn't teach us to pray for the advancement of any earthly kingdom but to pray for the arrival of his Father's kingdom, "Your kingdom come, your will be done!" By praying these words, we are reminded of where our true allegiance must be as believers—with our heavenly Father and his kingdom. When Jesus came preaching, the thing he talked and preached about the most was the kingdom of God. "The phrase 'kingdom of God' appears 162 times in the New

Testament."[3] The very "gospel" message (gospel means "good news") is about the kingdom of God.

> **(S13) Mark 1:14-15** (ESV)
> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The good news about Jesus is tied directly to the arrival of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:1). Jesus doesn't say, "The kingdom of God is coming" or "is almost here," but "the kingdom of God is at hand!" That means God's rule and reign have arrived! The promised king has arrived, the descendent of Eve come to crush the serpent, and it is God himself (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 9:6-7; Colossians 1:13-14).

When we "repent and believe in the gospel," we turn from our allegiance to Babylon, whichever Babylon God has placed us in, and we pledge ourselves to king Jesus. We live according to his kingdom ethic, the Sermon on the Mount, and we follow him back into the kingdoms of this world as agents of his heavenly kingdom. Chuck Colson put it this way, "the Christian's goal is not to strive to rule, but to be ruled."[4] We don't go grabbing "power over" others to enforce Christ's kingdom, but exerting "power under" others by sacrificing for our neighbors, loving them, and sharing Christ.[5]

Our allegiance must be to Christ and his kingdom above all else. When we mix allegiances with God and country, we get events like the January 6th, 2021 insurrection, where those who claimed to be Christians stormed the U.S. Capitol, even waving a Christian flag as they did it.[6] This week I watched the HBO documentary about the insurrection, *Four Hours at the Capitol*. If you watch it, and it's painful to watch, you will see people pray and call on the name of Jesus and wear t-shirts talking about God and country as they commit acts of terror. That's demonic. "What do you get when you mix religion and politics?... Politics."[7] "No one can serve two masters"(Matthew 6:24). God or country?

C.S. Lewis warned against mixing extreme "Patriotism" and extreme "Pacifism" with religion because we tend to bend our faith to do the will of our political cause. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis wrote as if a wiser, more experienced demon was writing to his younger protégé about how to entrap a Christian. The older demon writes:

> **(S14)** Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the 'cause', in which Christianity is valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favour of the British war-effort or of Pacifism. . . . Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man. . . .[8]

Remember, C.S. Lewis is not writing to America but Great Britain. To be defined as people by absolute love of country or hate of country is unbiblical. The country where we are born can be a gift from God, but it must never become an idol. God calls us to submit to the government but

recognize where its authority comes from and have ultimate allegiance to him. This is why we as Christians need to go back to a very simple yet radical confession of the early Church.

(S15) "Jesus is Lord."

Have you ever confessed, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior?" That's what it means to be a Christian, right? But do we understand what we're confessing when we say that? I've heard a pastor says, "Jesus is my leader and forgiver," which I think is pretty good but doesn't quite get at the radical nature of these titles. One author writes of the historical context, "Two common titles used for the Roman emperor were lord (kurios) and savior (soter)."[9] Here's what Paul says when he uses these titles:

> **(S16) Philippians 3:20-21** (ESV)
> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

We underestimate the power of what Paul is saying here. Maybe you've heard of the Battle of Appomattox, where the Civil War ended. A battle like that took place outside of Philippi, to whom Paul is writing. Do you remember learning about Brutus assassinating Julius Caesar? "Et tu Brute?" That sparked a civil war between Mark Antony and Octavian against Brutus and Cassius.

Their civil war came to a head outside of the city of Philippi, where Cassius and Brutus lost. Antony and Octavian rewarded the city for their part and made it into a "Roman colony"(Acts 16:12). They likely granted Roman citizenship to many of its people and retired military veterans and their families there. So, Philippi probably had a significant patriotic presence who strongly identified with their Roman heritage.

This is like if we sent out mass-mailers to the area in and around Hanscom Air Force Base, to all the current and retired military, telling all the Christians that they are no longer citizens of America. They are citizens of heaven, and their Commander and Chief, their President, is Jesus.[10] "Christ" means God's anointed king. Do you mean Jesus is my President every time you say Jesus Christ? To be a dual citizen is to be a citizen of two countries and have all the rights and responsibilities of each. But if what Paul says is correct, our heavenly and earthly citizenships are not equal. One far outweighs and challenges the other. Here's how Preston Sprinkle, one of my favorite authors explains Paul's patriotic Roman context:

> **(S17)** *Lord, savior, son of god, god, peace, justice, and gospel*. These were all familiar terms used to praise the Caesars of Rome. When Christians stole these titles and applied them to a Jew who was crucified as a revolutionary, they were bound to start a fight—especially in a patriotic city like Philippi. Roman military vets, who had sacrificed for the peace of Rome, would be particularly offended.
>
> When Paul hails Jesus as Lord and Savior, we need to hear a faint first-century echo: *Caesar is not*.[11]

Biden is not. Trump is not. America is not. The Republican and Democratic parties are not. *Jesus is Lord*. This is treason. Our heavenly and earthly citizenships are not equal. As Christians today, people who profess Jesus as Lord, we need to be very careful about how we think of God and our country. I believe a general sense of patriotism can be good, but that something called "Christian nationalism" is sinful. Let me explain:

a. (S18) Patriotism – Love of a people and place (not state and power).

Good patriotism helps us love the particular time and place in which God has placed us.[12] It's good to love your neighbors, your community and appreciate the country God has given you and the freedoms it affords. We express our love for our country, our patriotism, by seeking its shalom. We recognize we live in Babylon, but it's "our Babylon," so we love and serve it. Yet loving our nation includes critiquing it when it falters and calling it to God's vision for justice and flourishing. But patriotic love is different than allegiance to "the state and its power."[13] When we begin to exalt in the state and its power and swear our allegiances to it, healthy patriotism turns unhealthy and even idolatrous.

b. (S19) Christian Nationalism – My nation is God's nation.

Christian nationalism sees America (or Great Britain or any nation) not as Babylon but as a second kind of Israel, God's special and favored Christian nation.[14] But, I do not believe any nation, including America, can be a Christian nation because Christianity is not a set of values or policies. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Jesus has already manifested his kingdom in this world in tiny kingdom "outposts" and "embassies," called… the church.[15] No nation is the second Israel, except for God's people, Christ's bride, the church, which is all people from all times and places who God has saved, both in the Old Testament and New.[16] So, to believe any nation is a Christian nation is to misunderstand Jesus's kingdom and his Lordship over all nations. Do you hear how radical it is to say…?

(S20) "Jesus is Lord."

But here's the surprising part. Bruce Riley Ashford puts it like this:

> **(S21)** To the extent that we truly do acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we will engage the Caesar before us with compassion, respect, and wisdom, speaking and acting in ways that contribute to the common good. In other words, the more we pledge allegiance to Christ, the better citizens of the United States of America we'll become.[17]

The more we live a kingdom ethic, the more we embody the Sermon on the Mount in our nation, the better citizens of our nation we will be. We will seek the good of others before ourselves. We will care about our communities and follow Jesus into any part of society to love our neighbor there.

Jesus is not like any earthly king. His enthronement wasn't like Napoleon's, full of ego and pride. His enthronement did involve a crown, a crown of thorns, and a royal robe of purple as he suffered and bled.[18] His scepter was a spear thrust in his side.[19] He was lifted, high and exalted on a cross, and above him, the state nailed a declaration that he was indeed a king.[20] And he did all that not to be instated as Lord of our nation, but Lord of all countries and powers. Jesus has

ascended into heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, and is now ruling and reigning over all nations, including ours.[21] Will you come and bend the knee before the king of king, Jesus? **(S22)** And will you confess that "Jesus is Lord" and live like he is Lord? Not Caesar, not the President, not your political party, only him. *Jesus is Lord*.

> *Benediction* – **Jude 24-25** (NIV)
> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my sixth sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, the *Reign of Christ*. Here are a few follow-up steps to continue to pray and process:

Study: Take time to reflect on the "kingdom of God." Go to BibleGateway.com and type "kingdom" into the search bar. Notice all the times it shows up in the Old Testament and New. Read through some of the verses. What themes do you notice? What is the kingdom of God in the New Testament? What surprises you about Jesus' kingship? How does Jesus' kingdom challenge the political and social orders of his day?

Listen (sermon): Listen to Pastor Tony Evans preach on "The Concept of Kingdom Voting." Tony describes how God calls Christians to operate differently, according to the kingdom of God. YouTube: https://youtu.be/Pp52RqtW_XY (Sep 7, 2020; 36 minutes).

Listen (podcast): Listen to Skye Jethani interview retired NFL football player Derwin Gray about the Lord's Prayer: "Holy Post Episode 477: Rethinking the Lord's Prayer with Derwin Gray." The interview starts at 50:12. Derwin and Skye touch on the kingdom of God and many of the same themes from my sermon. YouTube: https://youtu.be/arOGhzIYvbE?t=3012 (start at 50:12; about a 30-minute interview). The *Holy Post* podcast is my favorite podcast. I listen to it regularly.

Read (intermediate): This is, perhaps, one of my favorite books, and yet also one of the most challenging books I have ever read (and re-read) to our modern 21st century way of thinking about God and country, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* by Preston Sprinkle (original edition, new edition). Sprinkle does a deep dive into what the Bible says about nations, kingdoms, wars, and our citizenship as Christians. If you want to be challenged, this will do it.

Worship: Listen and enjoy the song: "Father, Let Your Kingdom Come (featuring *Urban Doxology*, Liz Vice, and Latifah Alattas)." The song is a joyful 5 minutes. Thank God for his kingdom and pray his kingdom come, his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom of God is a big topic, and trying to live in light of it in our modern 21st century can feel very challenging. Let's talk about it more at next week's Christian education class.

With love,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. If there was something in my sermon that struck a nerve, and you'd like to push back or talk more privately, my door is always open. I also invite you to bring your opinions, even strong ones, to our Christian Education hour so we can process them as the church body.

1. “Flag Ceremony,” Awana Clubs International, 2008, accessed November 6, 2021 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57fea07646c3c4ab503eaa95/t/591a339a1e5b6cd20966d87b/1494889370226/FlagCeremony.pdf. “Flag bearers face each other, holding the Awana flag lower than the national flag.”

2. “Displaying the Falg with other Flags,” United States Flag Store, published 2009, accessed October 28, 2021 https://www.united-states-flag.com/displaying-flags.html.

3. Eugene Cho, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian’s Guide to Engaging Politics* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2020), 105, Kindle.

4. Charles Colson, *God and Government: An Insider’s View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), chap. 6, Kindle.

5. Gregory Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) 14, 31, Kindle. Boyd has a different perspective than I do on how to interact with Government, but I like his power over vs. power under conception.

6. Robert P. Jones, “Taking the white Christian nationlist symbols at the Capitol riot seriously,” Religion News Services, published January 7, 2021, accessed October 28, 2021 https://religionnews.com/2021/01/07/taking-the-white-christian-nationalist-symbols-at-the-capitol-riot-seriously/.

7. Keith Giles, *Jesus Untangled: Crucifying Our Politics to Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2017) 19, Kindle.

8. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1942) 34-35, Kindle.

9. Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013) 122, Kindle. Emphasis his.

10. “Christians in Politics Debate - Greg Boyd, Shane Claiborne, and Chuck Colson,” Third Way, published October 19, 2014, accessed October 27, 2021 https://youtu.be/7Ky32FX03GA.

11. Sprinkle, *Fight*, 122-123, Kindle. Emphasis his.

12. Paul D. Miller, “What Is Christian Nationalism?” Christianity Today, February 3, 2021, accessed February 4, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html.

13. Bonnie Kristian, “How to Have Patriotism Without Nationalism,” ChristianityToday, published June 21, 2021, accessed October 28, 2021 https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/july-august/how-to-have-patriotism-without-nationalism.html.

14. Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014) 115, Kindle.

15. Jonathan Leeman, *How The Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020) 144, Kindle.

16. Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 3:29, 6:16.

17. Bruce Riley Ashford, *Letters to An American Christian* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 3, Kindle.

18. Jon Collins and Tim Mackie, “Gospel of The Kingdom,” YouTube, February 19, 2016, accessed February 6, 2021, https://youtu.be/xmFPS0f-kzs. See also John 19:2.

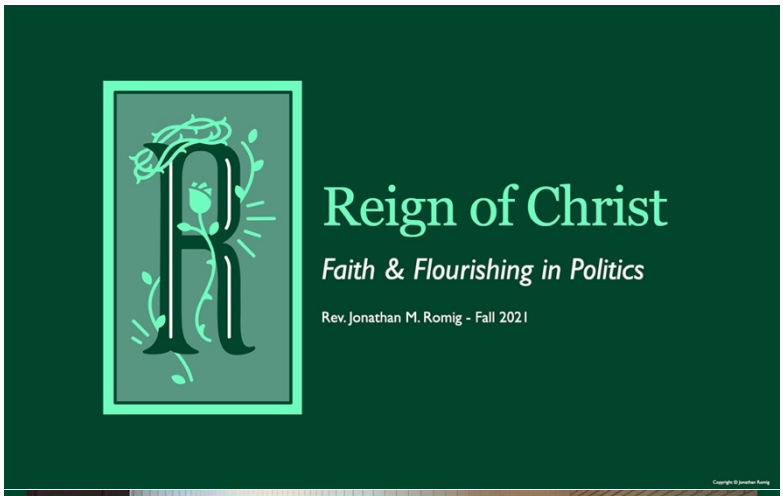
19. John 19:34.

20. Isaiah 52:13; John 19:19.

21. Psalm 110:1; Mark 14:62; Acts 1:3; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2.

#6 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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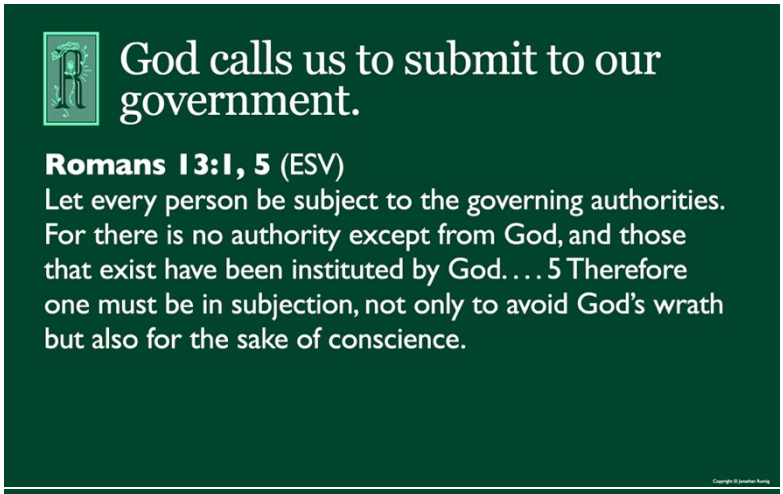
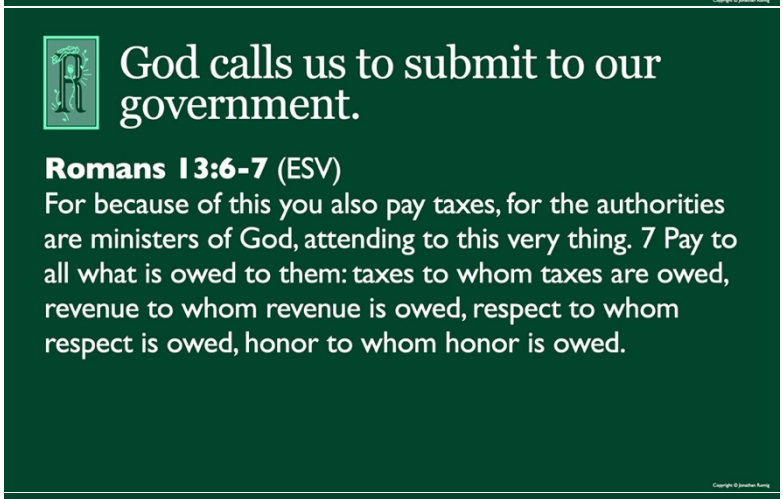

God calls us to submit to our government.
Romans 13:1, 5 (ESV)
Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. . . . 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Slide 5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Slide 6

Slide 7

The government derives its authority from God's authority.

V1. "For there is not authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

V2. "Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed…"

V4. "for (the government) is God's servant for your good… For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

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Slide 8

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Slide 9

The government derives its authority from God's authority.

Daniel 2:21a (ESV)
He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;

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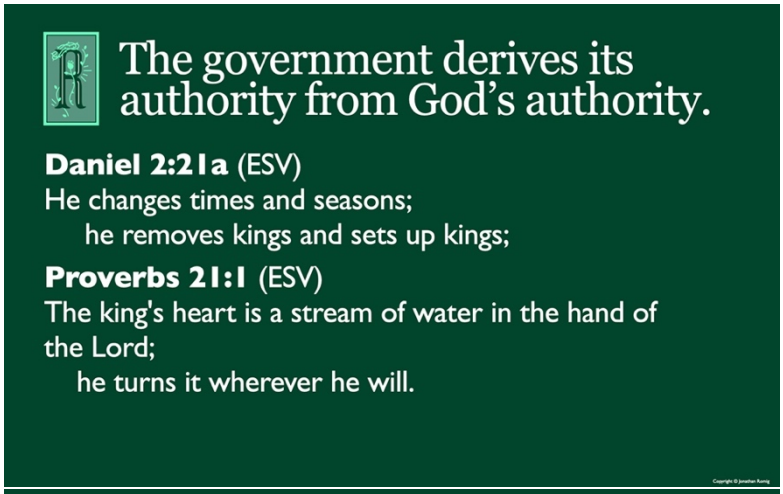
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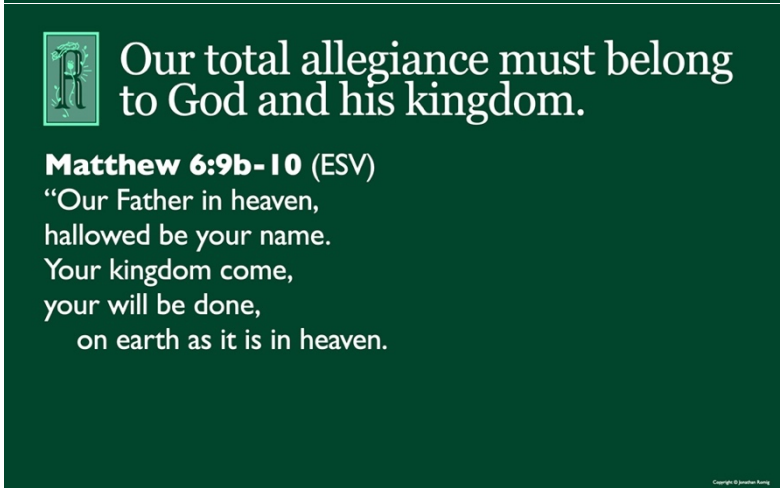
Slide 12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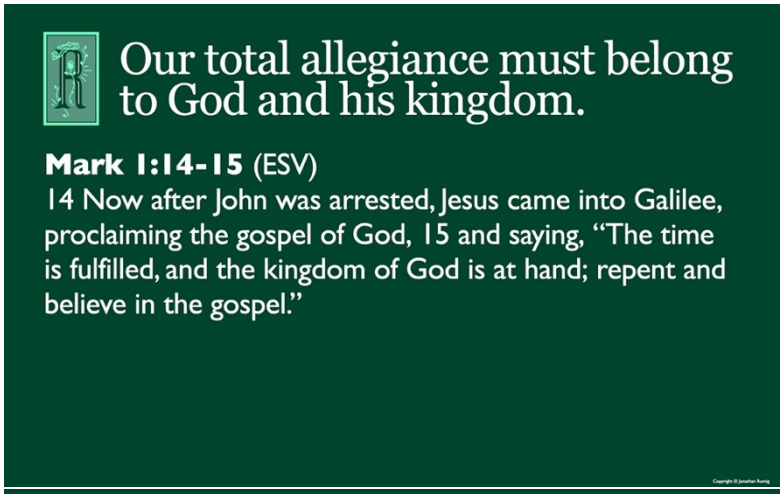
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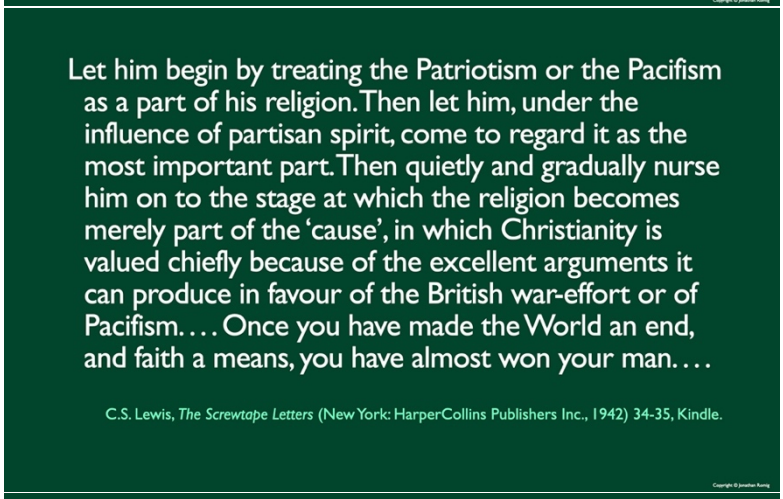
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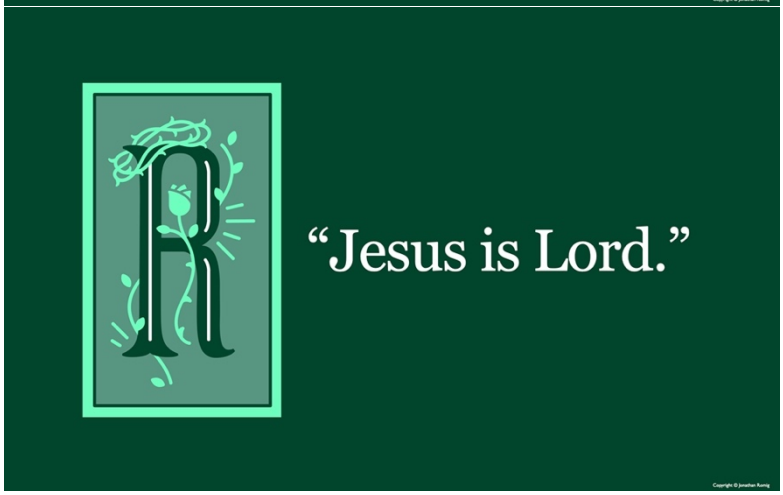

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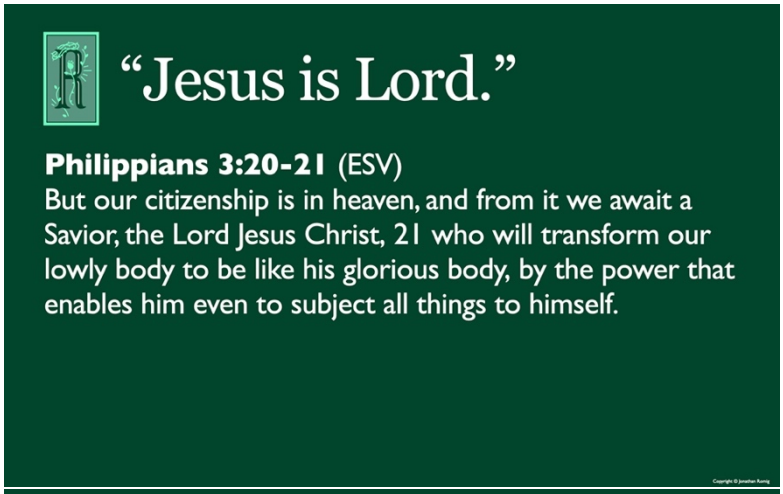
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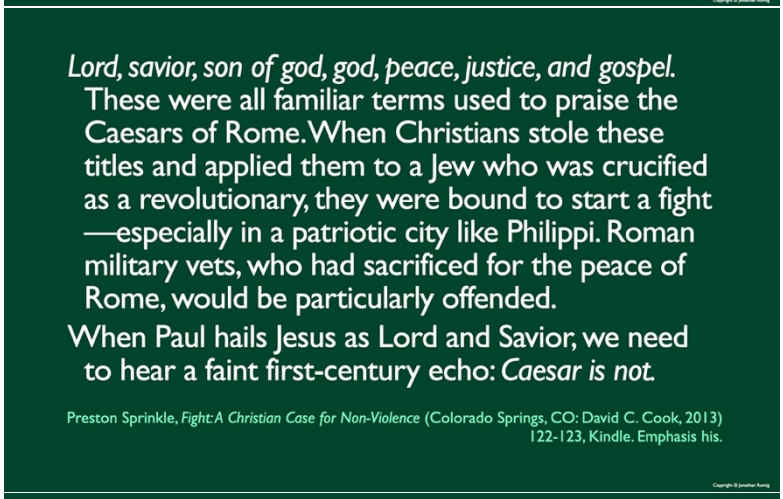
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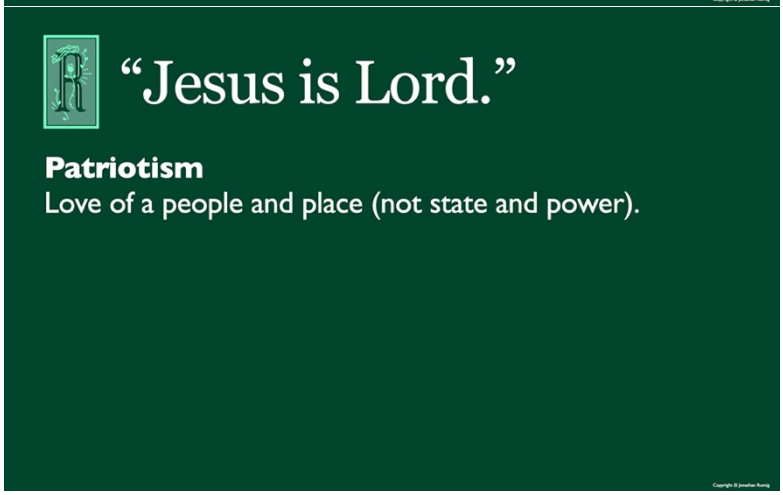

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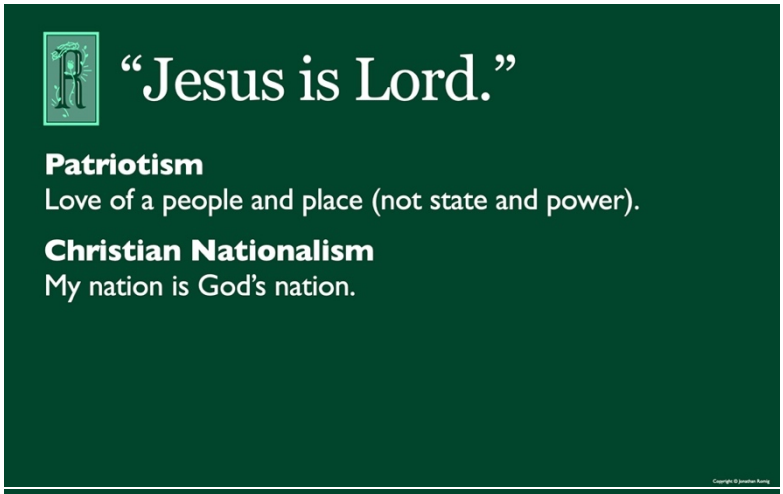

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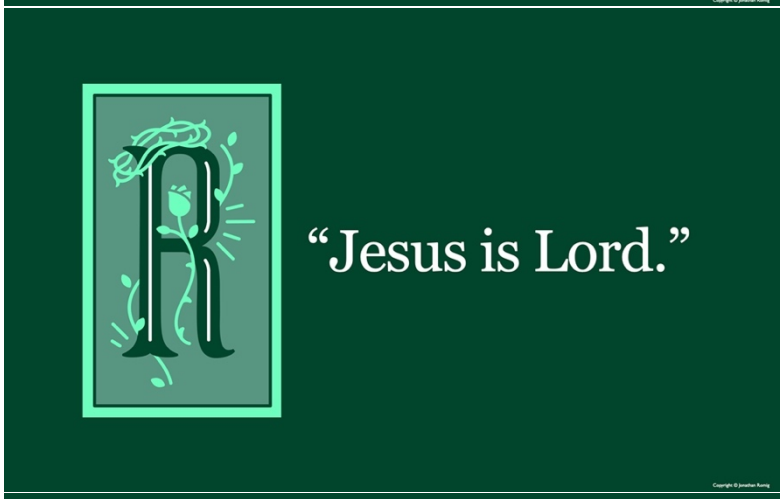

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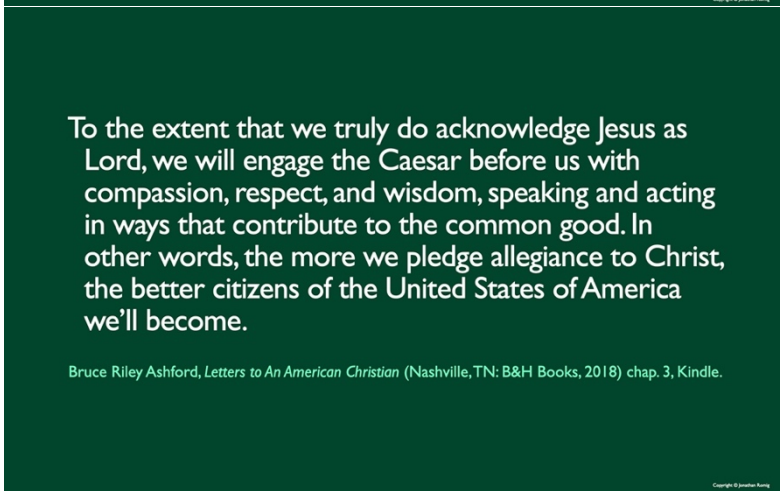
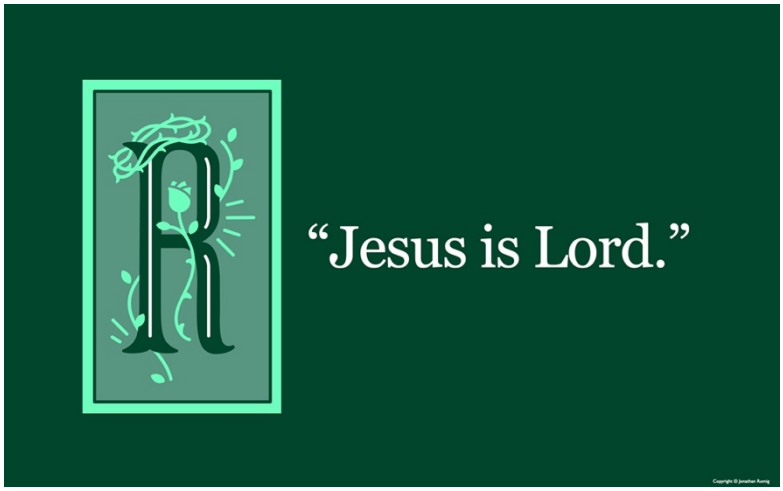

To the extent that we truly do acknowledge Jesus as Lord, we will engage the Caesar before us with compassion, respect, and wisdom, speaking and acting in ways that contribute to the common good. In other words, the more we pledge allegiance to Christ, the better citizens of the United States of America we'll become.
Bruce Riley Ashford, Letters to An American Christian (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2018) chap. 3, Kindle.

Slide 22



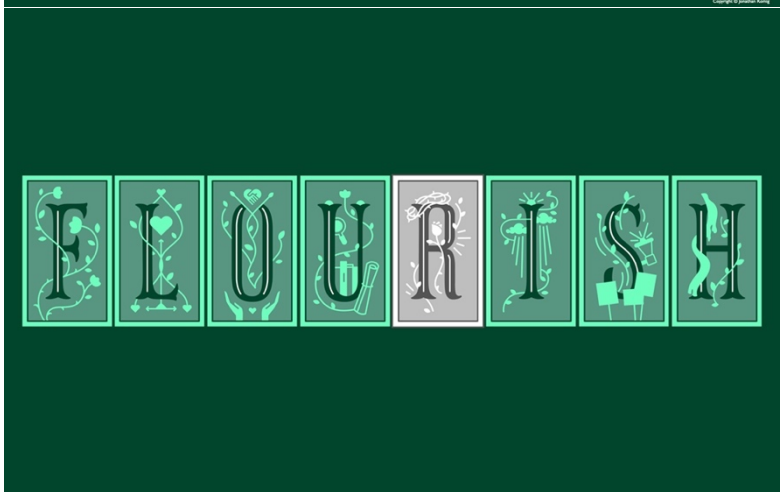
#6 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation and silently while we discuss. Fruit is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

Slide 3



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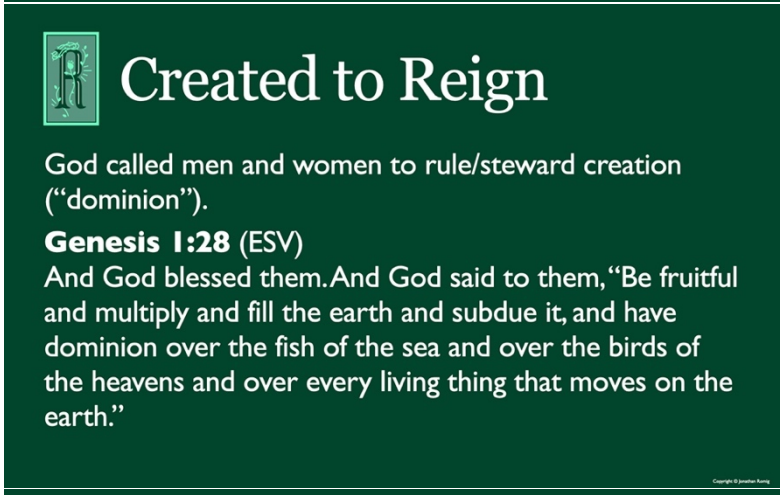
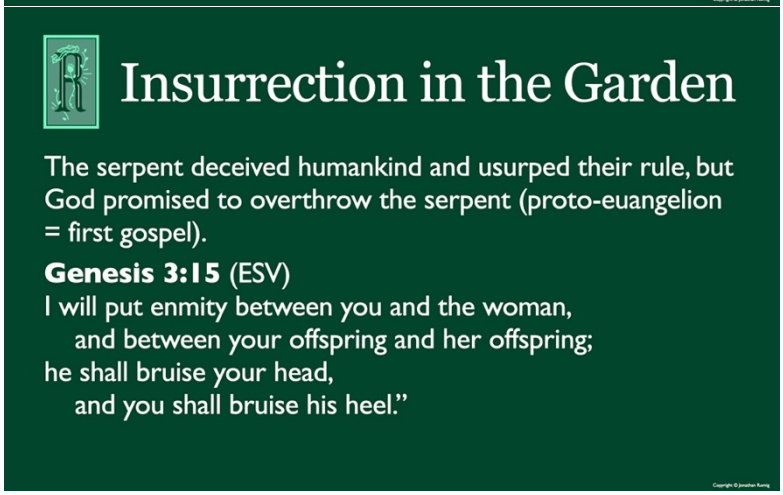

Created to Reign
God called men and women to rule/steward creation ("dominion").
Genesis 1:28 (ESV)
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Slide 6


Insurrection in the Garden
The serpent deceived humankind and usurped their rule, but God promised to overthrow the serpent (proto-euangelion = first gospel).
Genesis 3:15 (ESV)
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

Slide 7

A Kingly Template

God gave his people, Israel, a template for their kings.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

- God will choose the king (anoint/Messiah).
- Not a foreigner.
- Not acquire many horses or return to Egypt.
- Not have many wives or lots of gold and silver.
- Read and transcribe God's law.

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Slide 8

"By means of human kingship, when conducted on God's terms, Israel might learn again to know the Lord as their supreme king and themselves as God's royal representatives. In other words, since God was their ultimate king, a just king could mirror God's rule . . ."

James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction* (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) 13, Kindle.

God gave Israel a template for earthly kings to recapture some of that kingdom justice and stewardship lost in the garden.

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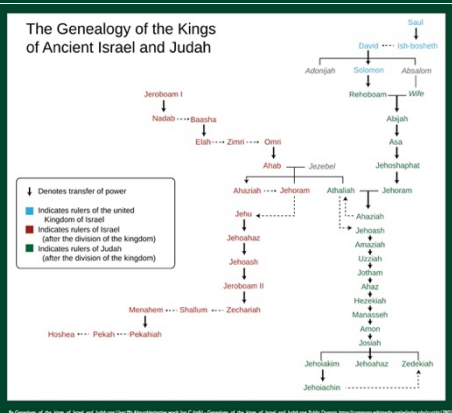

How well did the kings fit God's template?

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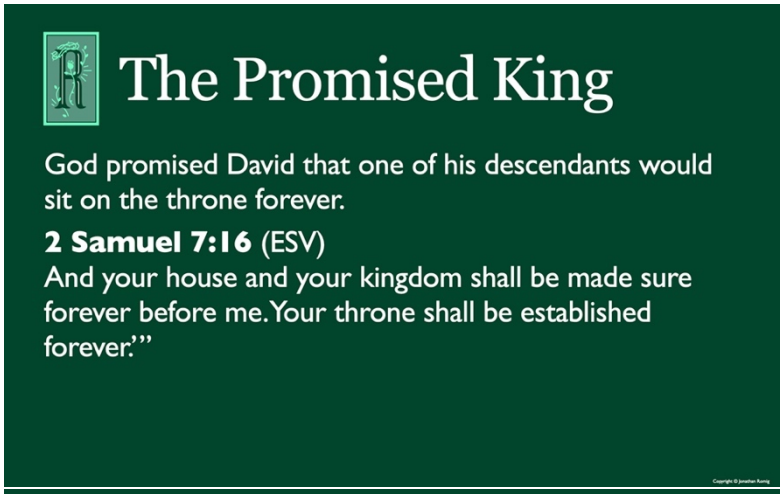
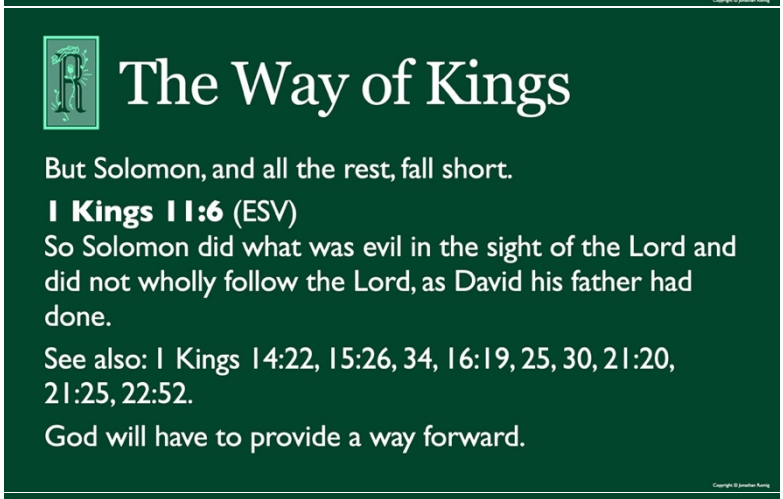
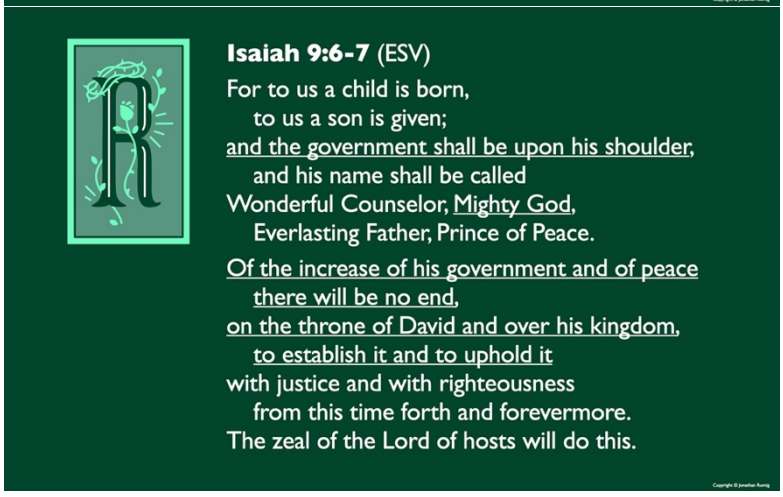
Slide 10


The Promised King
God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne forever.
2 Samuel 7:16 (ESV)
And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"

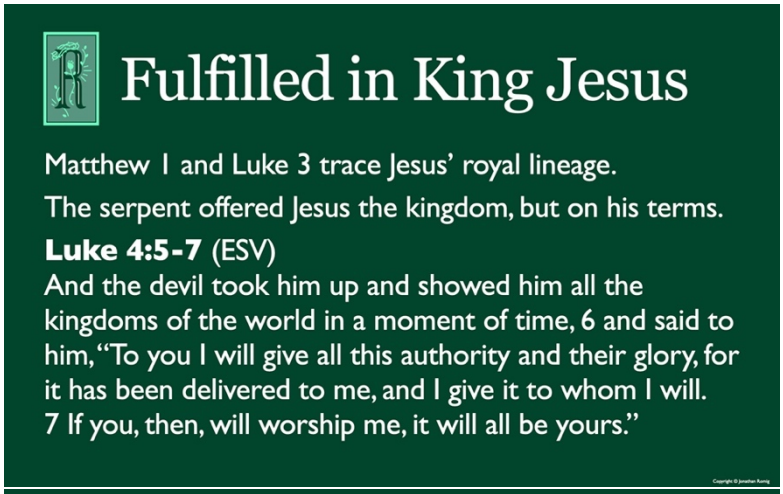
Slide 11


The Way of Kings
But Solomon, and all the rest, fall short.
1 Kings 11:6 (ESV)
So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.
See also: 1 Kings 14:22, 15:26, 34, 16:19, 25, 30, 21:20, 21:25, 22:52.
God will have to provide a way forward.

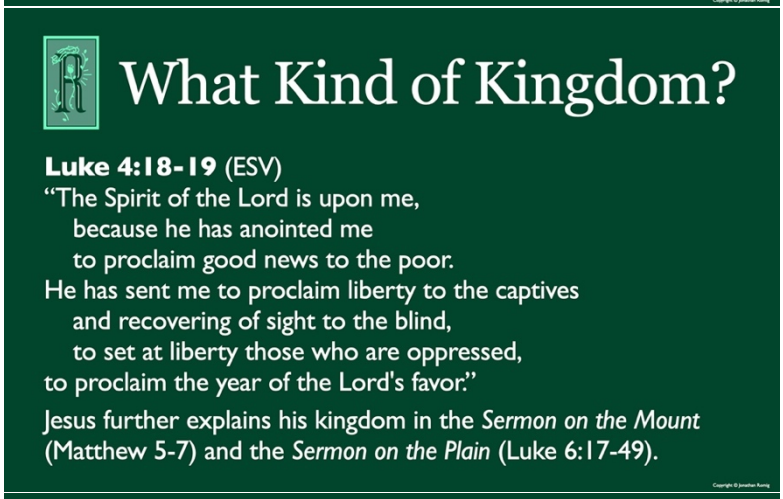
Slide 12


Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

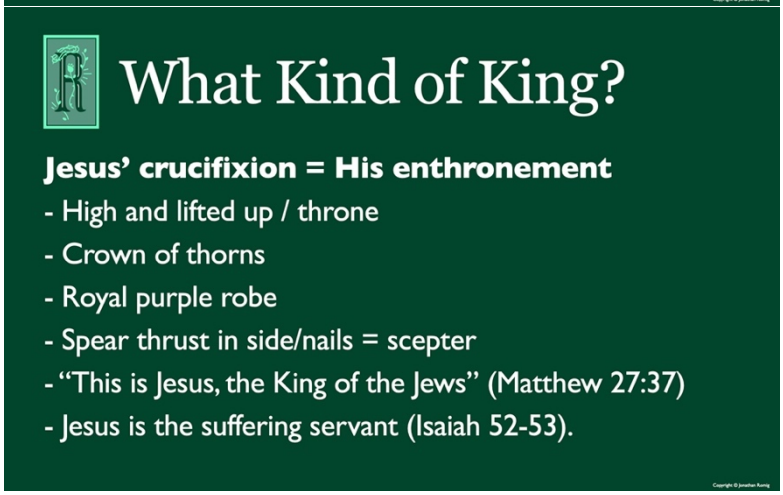
Slide 13


Fulfilled in King Jesus
Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus' royal lineage.
The serpent offered Jesus the kingdom, but on his terms.
Luke 4:5-7 (ESV)
And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

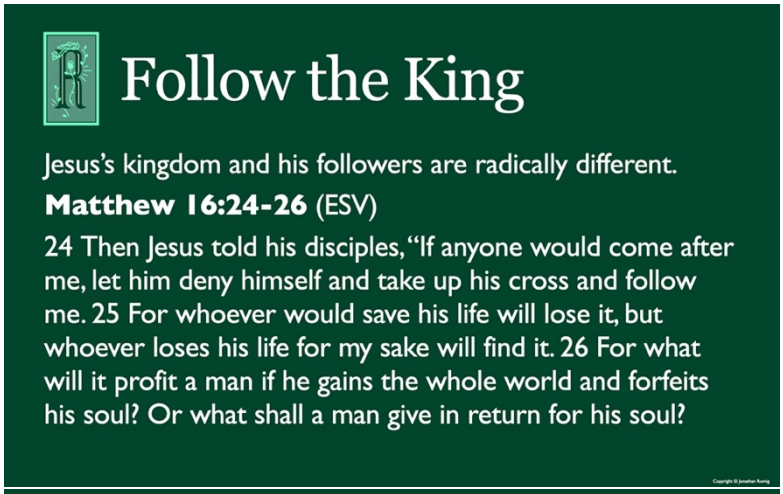
Slide 14


What Kind of Kingdom?
Luke 4:18-19 (ESV)
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Jesus further explains his kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49).

Slide 15


What Kind of King?
Jesus' crucifixion = His enthronement
- High and lifted up / throne
- Crown of thorns
- Royal purple robe
- Spear thrust in side/nails = scepter
- "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37)
- Jesus is the suffering servant (Isaiah 52-53).

Slide 16


Follow the King
Jesus's kingdom and his followers are radically different.
Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)
24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?
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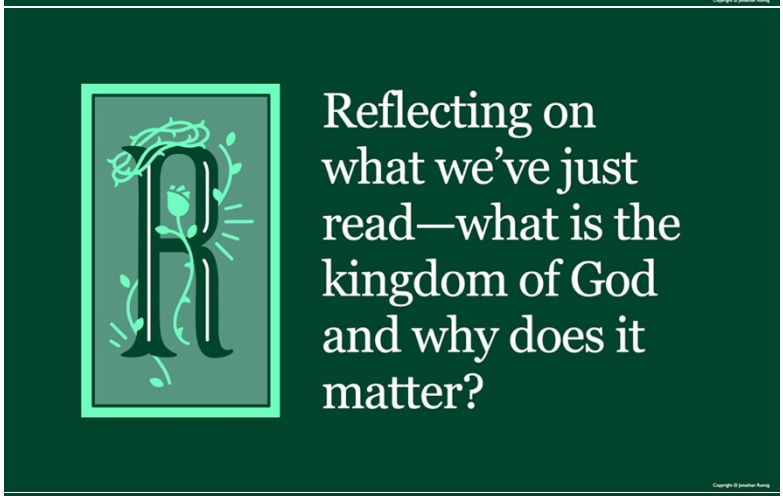
Slide 17



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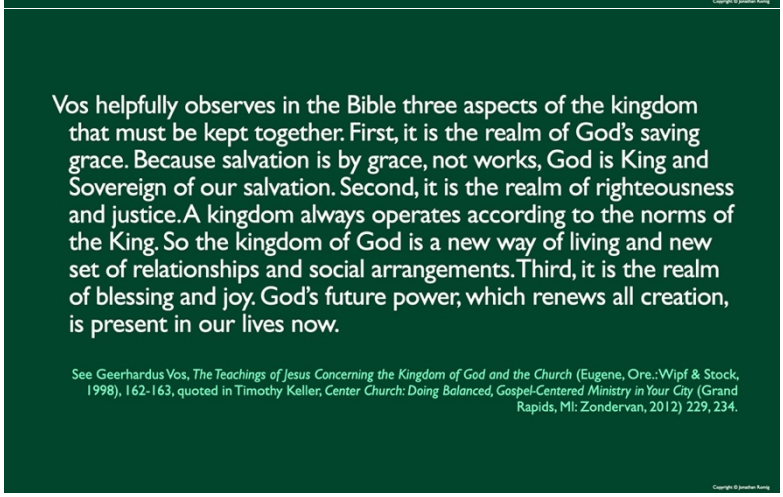
Vos helpfully observes in the Bible three aspects of the kingdom that must be kept together. First, it is the realm of God's saving grace. Because salvation is by grace, not works, God is King and Sovereign of our salvation. Second, it is the realm of righteousness and justice. A kingdom always operates according to the norms of the King. So the kingdom of God is a new way of living and new set of relationships and social arrangements. Third, it is the realm of blessing and joy. God's future power, which renews all creation, is present in our lives now.
See Geerhardus Vos, The Teachings of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 162-163, quoted in Timothy Keller, Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) 229, 234.
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Slide 19

If Jesus had been preaching the arrival of a kingdom that had nothing to do with this world, a kingdom removed from "real politics," then neither the Jewish nor the Roman authorities would have been so upset with him. To the contrary, however, the claims that Jesus was making had to do with God's lordship over all kingdoms on earth, over every human authority in this world.

James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction* (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) 9, Kindle.

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Slide 20

What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?

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Slide 21

What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?

Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV)

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

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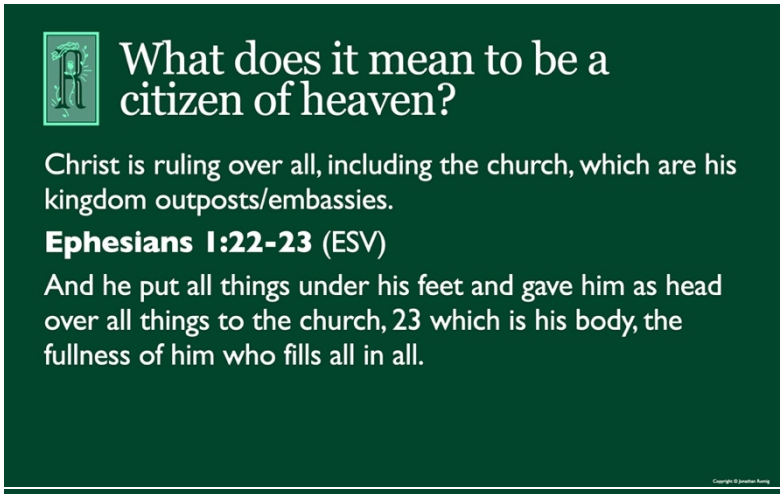
What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?
Christ is ruling over all, including the church, which are his kingdom outposts/embassies.
Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV)
And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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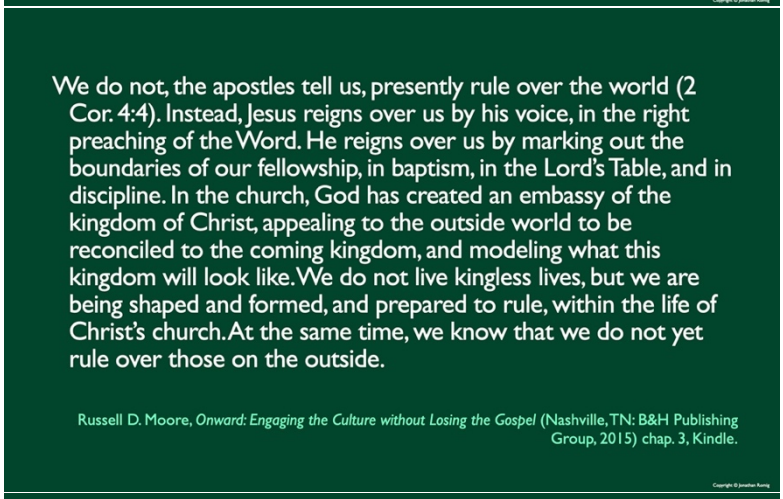
We do not, the apostles tell us, presently rule over the world (2 Cor. 4:4). Instead, Jesus reigns over us by his voice, in the right preaching of the Word. He reigns over us by marking out the boundaries of our fellowship, in baptism, in the Lord's Table, and in discipline. In the church, God has created an embassy of the kingdom of Christ, appealing to the outside world to be reconciled to the coming kingdom, and modeling what this kingdom will look like. We do not live kingless lives, but we are being shaped and formed, and prepared to rule, within the life of Christ's church. At the same time, we know that we do not yet rule over those on the outside.
Russell D. Moore, Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 3, Kindle.

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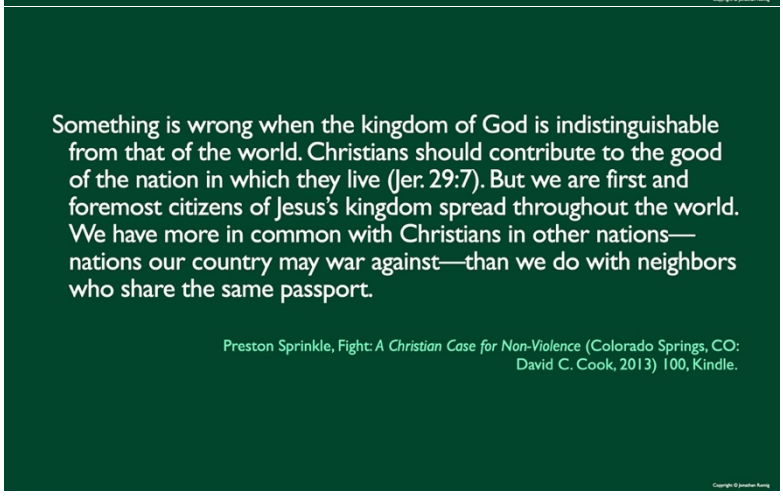
Something is wrong when the kingdom of God is indistinguishable from that of the world. Christians should contribute to the good of the nation in which they live (Jer. 29:7). But we are first and foremost citizens of Jesus's kingdom spread throughout the world. We have more in common with Christians in other nations—nations our country may war against—than we do with neighbors who share the same passport.
Preston Sprinkle, Fight: A Christian Case for Non-Violence (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013) 100, Kindle.

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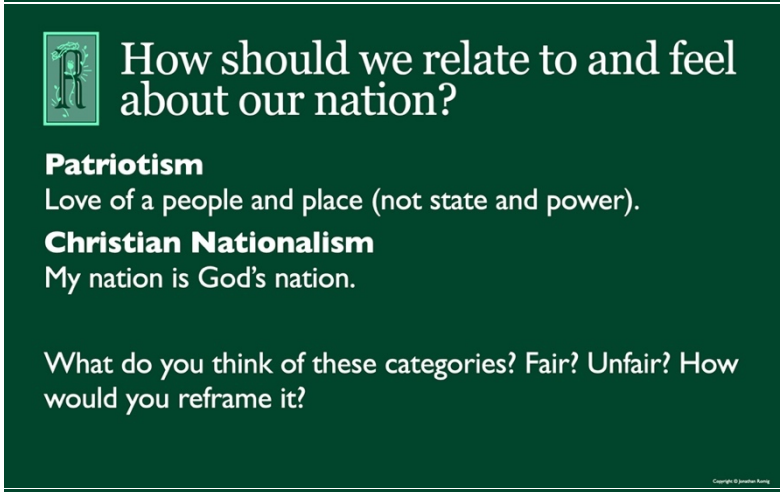
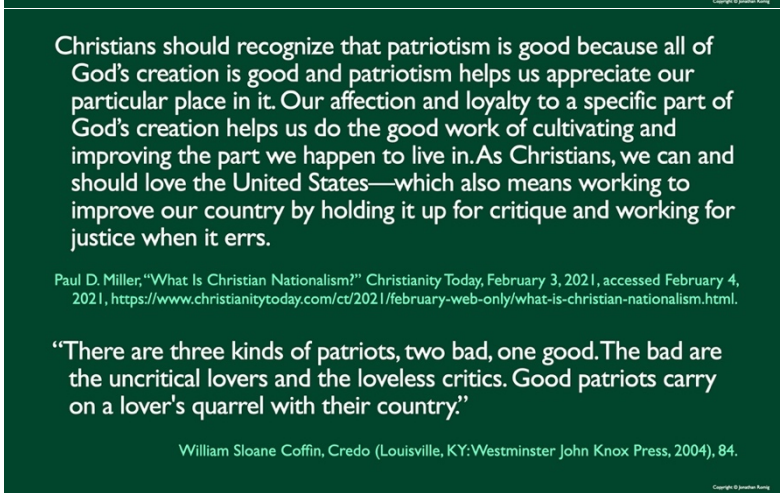

How should we relate to and feel about our nation?
Patriotism
Love of a people and place (not state and power).
Christian Nationalism
My nation is God's nation.
What do you think of these categories? Fair? Unfair? How would you reframe it?

Slide 27


Christians should recognize that patriotism is good because all of God's creation is good and patriotism helps us appreciate our particular place in it. Our affection and loyalty to a specific part of God's creation helps us do the good work of cultivating and improving the part we happen to live in. As Christians, we can and should love the United States—which also means working to improve our country by holding it up for critique and working for justice when it errs.
Paul D. Miller, "What Is Christian Nationalism?" Christianity Today, February 3, 2021, accessed February 4, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html.
"There are three kinds of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their country."
William Sloane Coffin, Credo (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 84.

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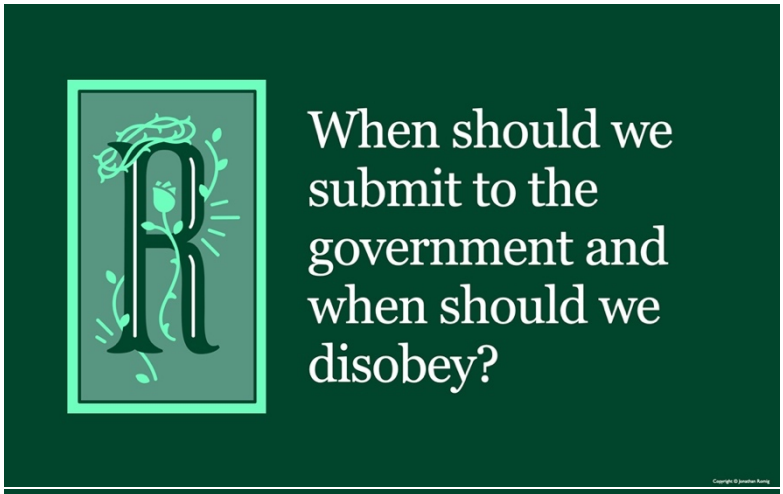

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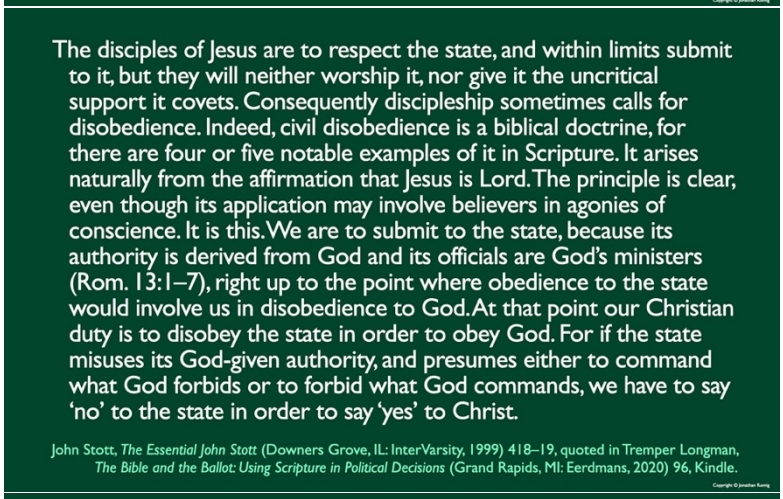
The disciples of Jesus are to respect the state, and within limits submit to it, but they will neither worship it, nor give it the uncritical support it covets. Consequently discipleship sometimes calls for disobedience. Indeed, civil disobedience is a biblical doctrine, for there are four or five notable examples of it in Scripture. It arises naturally from the affirmation that Jesus is Lord. The principle is clear, even though its application may involve believers in agonies of conscience. It is this. We are to submit to the state, because its authority is derived from God and its officials are God's ministers (Rom. 13:1–7), right up to the point where obedience to the state would involve us in disobedience to God. At that point our Christian duty is to disobey the state in order to obey God. For if the state misuses its God-given authority, and presumes either to command what God forbids or to forbid what God commands, we have to say 'no' to the state in order to say 'yes' to Christ.
John Stott, The Essential John Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999) 418–19, quoted in Tremper Longman, The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 96, Kindle.

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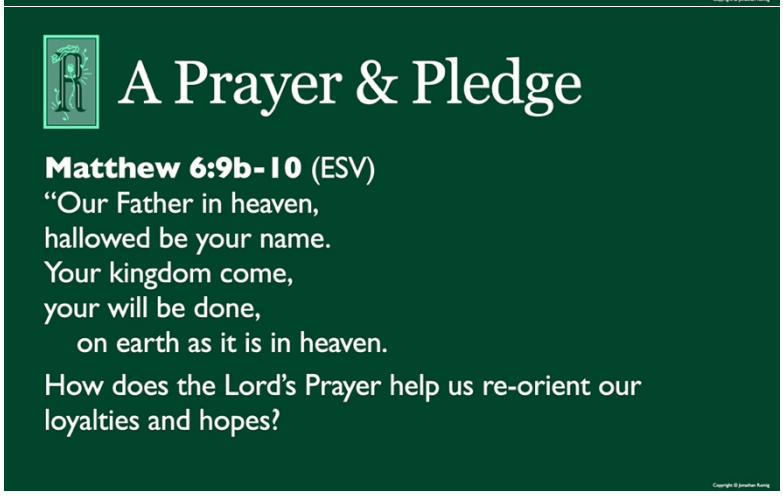
A Prayer & Pledge
Matthew 6:9b-10 (ESV)
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
How does the Lord's Prayer help us re-orient our loyalties and hopes?

Slide 31

R
Let's pray for
God's kingdom to
come and his will
to be done on earth
as it is in heaven.

Mark 12:13-17

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Image of God

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / November 14th, 2021

(S1-2) I want to start today's sermon with a quiz. By a show of hands, I want you to guess whether the following portion of tweets are about a sports team or politics. These are actual selections from tweets:

> **(S3)** His biggest win yet.
> Let's hear it for your [blank] champion[1]

Sports or politics? "Let's hear it for your 2021 #NASCAR Cup Series champion. . . " Sports!

> **(S4)** Heads, we win.
> Tails, you cheated.
> Give me a break man.[2]

Sports or politics? Politics! How about this one?

> **(S5)** [Blank] is a rough old sport, sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.
> But you pick yourself up and get back out there as hard as it is.
> Don't give up and don't lose faith.[3]

What do you think? Sports or politics? "Politics is a rough old sport…" Politics!

> **(S6)** PATRIOTS WIN!!! DOMINATION!!![4]

This one is kind of obvious, but you can hear it, "Democrats win! Republicans win! Domination!!!" I found these Twitter posts searching for words like win, lose, team, patriot, and victory. Politics and sports aren't so different. **(S7)** Imagine you're in a stadium, holding up a poster, the crowd is cheering and chanting, everyone is wearing their team's colors, red or blue. You could be at a football game or a political rally.[5] Are you "red team" or "blue team"?[6] Or maybe team purple?

At the end of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, God led the Israelites across the Jordan and into the land of Canaan, the promised land. As the twelve tribes approached the very first city, Jericho, their leader Joshua encountered a supernatural messenger, maybe an angel, perhaps God himself.

> **(S8) Joshua 5:13-14** (ESV)
> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" 14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

God called Israel to invade Canaan. So, you would think this supernatural messenger would have said, "I'm on your side, Joshua! I'm on your team, Israel." But he doesn't. This messenger says that he leads God's armies, and he has come. And the only proper response is to fall on your face and worship, to leave your side, your team, and join God's. Instead of identifying as red or blue, or like a sports team, God calls us to follow Jesus, to get on his team.

(S9) Jesus' opponents try to force him to pick a side.

Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, God's promised king, when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.[7] That's a bold political statement. But instead of driving out the Romans, instead of using his supernatural powers to free his countrymen, Jesus drives out the money changers from the temple grounds and tells parables criticizing Jerusalem's religious leaders (Mark 12:1-12). This upsets the powers that be, uniting the Pharisees and the Herodians to get rid of Jesus.

It's kind of like college football. I got my undergrad from Colorado State University, CSU. CSU is in a big rivalry with CU Boulder. Uck! Can't stand them. But here's something that both CSU and CU agree on. The Nebraska Cornhuskers are the worst. Nobody likes them. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. That's what happens to Jesus. The Herodians and Pharisees, two enemies, unite to take out Jesus:

> **(S10) Mark 12:13-14** (ESV)
> And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. 14 And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"

The **Herodians** supported Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee. They approved of his big government over Israel, Judea, and Jerusalem. They would have reported to Herod if Jesus was anti-taxation because that would mean he was anti-Herod.[8] They probably admired all the good Rome did, like building over 250,000 miles of roads, increasing trade, providing security, and creating the "Pax Romana," Roman peace.

But the **Pharisees** were a much more traditional religious audience who wanted everyone to follow the Old Testament holiness laws. They wanted Israel to be free from Rome's oppressive rule. They were nationalistic. They were not Herodians. Which side are you going to take, Jesus? Which partisan identity are you going to adopt? Big government Herodians or liberty-loving Pharisees?

But just like at Thanksgiving, it's hard to be a Republican if your family is Democrats, or vice-versa; Jesus might have felt personally pressured. One of Jesus' disciples was a tax collector, **Matthew** (also called Levi).[9] He might have been more on the side of the Herodians. Maybe he was whispering in one of Jesus' ears, "Say pay taxes to Caesar." But on the other side **Simon the Zealot** might have been shouting, "Heck no! Live free or die!"[10] Being called a Zealot meant you were passionate about holiness laws, like the Pharisees, but it could have also meant he was part of a band of anti-Roman rebels called Zealots.

Which side are you going to take, Jesus? Will you identify as a pro-taxes Herodian and lose your Jewish followers? Or will you identify as an anti-taxes Pharisee and get thrown in prison? It was the perfect trap. Do you ever feel pressured to pick a side? To be a Christian is to be a family-loving, freedom-loving, God-loving Republican? Or to be a Christian is to be a justice-loving, women-loving, poor-people-loving Democrat? What if Jesus doesn't fit into either of those parties?

When we as Christians pick a side or fall prey to identity politics, where we prioritize our group, our team against theirs, we all lose. We get further away from building bridges and cultivating shalom. In my deep dive into the Twitter-verse, I ran across this insightful tweet:

> **(S11)** Viewing politics as sport means one "team" wins and one "team" loses. But the R/D political divide misses the fact that we are all actually on the same team. When our representatives vote as a way to punish or simply "deny a win" for the other side we all lose.[11]

Jesus' opponents try to force him to pick a political side. So how does Jesus respond? What does Jesus do? This brings us to "I" in "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." Jesus goes to the doctrine of the image of God, the "Imago Dei."

(S12) Jesus shows a different way with the image of God.

Jesus knows the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to entrap him. "It's a trap!" But Jesus won't fall for it.

> **(S13) Mark 12:15-17** (ESV)
> But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." 17 Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

The Herodians and Pharisees try to box Jesus into an either/or option, but Jesus answers "yes, and …"[12] "Yes, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's." Jesus goes to the image of God to find a better way. As we look at what Jesus says about the image of God, we find **four truths**:

1) (S14) Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry.

When they ask Jesus if they should pay taxes, Jesus has to ask to borrow a denarius, one day's wages. Jesus doesn't even carry money. He lets Judas do that (John 12:4-6), which says something, doesn't it? Money just isn't that important to Jesus. Politics matter because people matter to God, but our positions might not be as important as we think.[13]

In 1896 the Presidential candidate for the Democratic party was a 36-year-old man named William Jennings Bryan. He ran against the "gold standard" because it hurt low-income workers. At the convention, he gave one of the most famous political speeches of all time, comparing the gold-standard to the cross.

> **(S15)** If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.[14]

Bryan felt so strongly about the gold standard he compared it to "a cross of gold." Doesn't that seem a bit too strong? Caring is not wrong. Elevating to ultimate is idolatry. What do we value that Jesus might want to challenge and expose our idols? I stumbled into a social-media political showdown recently. My gut instinct was to unfriend the person with whom I disagreed. But when I asked why I wanted to do that, I found some self-righteous anger in my heart. I wanted to be right. I wanted to win.[15] What's he revealing in your heart?

Jesus subtly exposes the Herodians and Pharisees' hypocrisy with the denarius. **(S16)** To carve an image into a coin was to make an idol. So, for them to carry a denarius was a little idolatrous. Where do we carry idols, and we don't even know it? I ran across a post on Twitter that declared "God wins!" because of a political victory. Really? God wins?! How do you know that?!

Sometimes I get **Christian voter guides** in the mail. They bother me. I believe it's good to be engaged and informed, to love God and others in the public square. That's what we're trying to do in this sermon series. But when someone is bold enough to say, "This is how Christians should vote," that makes me nervous. If you look a little closer, those guides are often one-sided. Are you for the right or the left, Jesus? Neither. Bow down and worship Jesus, not our political idols. *Jesus shows a different way with the image of God. 1) Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry.*

2) (S17) Jesus affirms yet right-sizes human authority.

(S18) A denarius had a carving of Tiberius Caesar on it with the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the divine Augustus."[16] Tiberius was the son of Octavian, who defeated Brutus after Caesar's assassination. And "On the opposite side was a picture of the Roman goddess of peace, Pax, with the Latin inscription 'High Priest.'"[17] Here, a coin claiming Tiberius Caesar was the son of god and could establish peace encounters the true Son of God who can establish peace on earth. There's so much irony!

Then Jesus asks, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" The Greek word for likeness is "eikon," and in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), eikon means image, idol, or likeness.[18] So it's like Jesus says, "Whose idol is on this coin? Whose image? Whose likeness?" The answer is Caesar's, the emperor's.

But when Jesus says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," he both affirms humankind's Genesis-one mandate to rule and steward the earth and yet also right-sizes Caesar's authority. Jesus recognizes Caesar's right to tax (see Reign of Christ sermon). And by using the word for "image," Jesus reminds his Jewish audience of the Genesis one image of God.

(S19) Genesis 1:27 (ESV)
So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Jesus is saying humankind and Caesar's authority matters, but God's authority is ultimate. Caesar is made in God's image, and so Caesar belongs to God. You're also made in God's image, so you belong to God too, all of you. Your money, your home, your heart, your past, present, and future, everything. Wanting to give God your vote is a good thing. But God will take all of you, your whole life, every moment of every day. Pay taxes to Caesar, to Trump, or Biden. Pay yourself to God.

Jesus shows a different way with the image of God; 1) Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry; 2) Jesus affirms yet right-sizes human authority.

3) (S20) Jesus affirms human dignity and worth.

Even though Jesus challenges Caesar, he also shows respect to Caesar by going to the doctrine of the image of God. He establishes that Caesar, and all human beings, should be treated with dignity, respect, and civility. Jesus treated the Herodians and Pharisees like they were made in the image of God, even though they were trying to get him. What would politics look like today if all the Christians changed from identity politics to image-of-God politics?

Partisanship – I listened to an interview with Bill Haslam this week, who served as two-term Governor of Tennessee for eight years (2011-2019). He tried to practice "faithful presence" while in office, and one of the ways he did that was by constantly reminding himself of the image of God in people. In his book, he tells the story of a woman approaching him to say how upset she was that he had recently gotten rid of learning cursive in public schools so that school children couldn't read the constitution anymore. But he hadn't done that. Yet, no matter how much he tried to explain, she wouldn't believe him. Haslam appreciates C.S. Lewis's quote on the image of God, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. . . ."[19] Whether it's Nancy Pelosi or Mitch McConnell, AOC or Benjamin Shapiro, Biden or Trump, they are all made in the image of God, and we need to treat them with dignity and respect even as we disagree.

Immigration - What would politics look like if when we encountered refugees at the border, the first thing we did was remember they are made in the image of God and worthy of dignity and respect? While we would still have a border, would we put them in cages? Would we divide up families? If this is a sliver of the divine, a mirror of God himself, in all his glory, how should that change how we run our border?

Abortion – What would politics look like if, when we addressed mothers and their unwanted pregnancies, we remembered the mom is made in the image of God, and this tiny preborn baby is being knit together into the image of God? Wouldn't that make us want to provide protection and care for both the mother and the preborn baby, even at deep cost to ourselves? I can adopt a child made in God's image? Amazing!

How would politics look different if we didn't start with Republican or Democrat, but with the image of God? Jesus went to the image of God, and so can we. *Jesus shows a different way with the image of God. 1) Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry. 2) Jesus affirms and right-sizes human authority. 3) Jesus affirms human dignity and worth.* And finally…

4) (S21) Jesus unites us in the perfect image of God.

Satan loves to drive wedges and divide, to make people pick a side. That's his strategy, but Jesus does something entirely different. He unites believers as one:

> **(S22) Galatians 3:28** (ESV)
> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, [there is neither Republican nor Democrat,] for you are all one in Christ Jesus.[20]

Where Satan and the world want to divide Jesus' followers up into partisan groups, Jesus unites us in himself in a brand-new humanity not marked by division but unity. As believers, we're made in God's image, and we're united as children of God, which is a far stronger bond than anything the world offers. Our unity in Christ doesn't mean we'll be uniform in our beliefs. But as Christ-followers, we strive to not find our identities in the team-sport that politics has become, but in Christ Jesus, who is the perfect image.

The Jews living in Jerusalem owed Tiberius Caesar a denarius. But as people made in God's image, we owe God everything. But who can pay that tax? It's far too steep. There's a story in Matthew where Jesus doesn't have enough money to pay a local tax, so he asks Peter to catch a fish, and inside its mouth, Peter finds the coin to pay the tax.[21] That's what God does for us. We owe God everything, but God provides the payment for us. Jesus is our coin. He is our treasure. **(S23)** "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature . . ." (**Hebrews 1:3a**) *Jesus unites us in the perfect image of God.*

God accepts Christ's life as a substitute for our own. He trades a perfect image for a dirty, broken one. To become a Christian is to believe, "I'm not enough. I fall short. I need Jesus. He is enough." So when you and I get all upset and start arguing about policies, politics, money, immigration, and abortion, remember our treasure is above. And as we worship our king, the true image bearer, we find our unity in him.

(S24) *Jesus' opponents try to force him to pick a political side, but he shows a different way with the image of God. 1) Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry. 2) Jesus affirms and right-sizes human authority. 3) Jesus affirms human dignity and worth. 4) Jesus unites us in the perfect image of God.*

> *Benediction* - **Numbers 6:24-26** (ESV)
> 24 The Lord bless you and keep you;
> 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
> 26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my seventh sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, the *Image of God*. The image of God (Imago Dei) is foundational to how we engage in politics. It not only gives us the right to rule and reign over our world for its good but gives us all, no matter our nationality or political party, immense value and worth. Here are a few ways to continue reflecting:

Journal: What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Take time to journal about what this means and how your perspective is changing on this doctrine. Think about your politics. How might the image of God change your political interactions and positions? Where do you think you do a good job of recognizing the image of God in others, and where could you recognize it a bit more?

Listen (sermon): Listen to Pastor Timothy Keller preach on Mark 12:13-17 in "Arguing About Politics." Let's be honest. His sermon is way better than mine! It adds perspective and depth to how to think about the image of God in politics. YouTube: https://youtu.be/U79Eef6U9nw (August 10, 2015; 46 minutes).

Listen (interview): Listen to Collin Hansen interview Bill Haslam about faithful presence and what it means for believers to bring the doctrine of the image of God into their political engagement. As a retired governor of Tennessee, he can speak to this in a really insightful way: "Faithful Presence in the Tennessee Capitol" by Collin Hansen and Bill Haslam (*TGC*, September 21, 2021). Posting: https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/gospelbound/faithful-presence-tennessee-capitol/

Article: How can we know if we've made an idol out of politics? That's something writer Joe Carter tries to answer in *The Gospel Coalition (TGC)* article: "How to Know if You've Made an Idol of Politics" (February 13, 2020). He's come up with a list of 21 questions meant to help us each reflect on our political engagement and discern if our politics have become idolatrous.

Worship: Listen and enjoy the song "We Are Messengers – Image of God (Official Lyric Video)." Take a moment to thank God for being made in his image, and ask him to help you treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve by being made in God's image too. Think of someone you disagree with politically. Take a moment and praise God for them having so much value and worth as images of God.

With love,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

1. Hendrick Motorsports (@TeamHendrick), Twitter, published November 7, 2021, accessed November 8, 2021 https://twitter.com/TeamHendrick/status/1457495074686873613.

2. PoliticsGirl (@IAmPoliticsGirl), Twitter, published November 5, 2021, accessed November 8, 2021 https://twitter.com/IAmPoliticsGirl/status/1456769111350910981.

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5. Dr. Mike Brooks, "How Politics Is Like Rooting for Our Favorite Sports Team," Psychology Today, September 24, 2020, accessed November 8, 2021 https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/tech-happy-life/202009/how-politics-is-rooting-our-favorite-sports-team.

6. Michael Devlin and Natalie B. Devlin, "Voters are starting to act like hard-core sports fans – with dangerous repercussions for democracy," The Conversation, published January 21, 2021, accessed November 8, 2021 https://theconversation.com/voters-are-starting-to-act-like-hard-core-sports-fans-with-dangerous-repercussions-for-democracy-153175.

7. 1 Kings 1:38-39; Zechariah 9:9; Mark 11:1-11.

8. Originally published in "The Certain Gospel: Where Jesus Stands Politically | Luke 20:20-26," self-published August 25, 2018 https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/the-certain-gospel-where-jesus-stands-politically-luke-2020-26/.

9. Mark 2:13-14.

10. Luke 6:15.

11. Chris Strobel (@chrisatnku), Twitter, published November 7, 2021, accessed November 8, 2021 https://twitter.com/chrisatnku/status/1457360591572570115.

12. David Krahling, "Avoding A Sucker's Choice: Choosing "And" Instaed of "Or," Interstates, published November 7, 2017, accessed November 8, 2021 https://www.interstates.com/suckers-choice/.

13. Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 2, Kindle.

14. Paolo E. Colletta, William Jennings Bryan, vol. 1: Political Evangelist, 1860-1908 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) quoted in Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Leicester, England: Eerdmans, 1994) 151, Kindle.

15. Jesus is the embodied word of God. He is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

16. Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007) 1869. See Matthew 22:19 footnote.

17. Crossway Bibles, *ESV*, 1869.

18. LXX "idol" - 2 Chronicles 33:7; Hosea 13:2; Isaiah 40:19. Image/likeness: Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 3, 9:6.

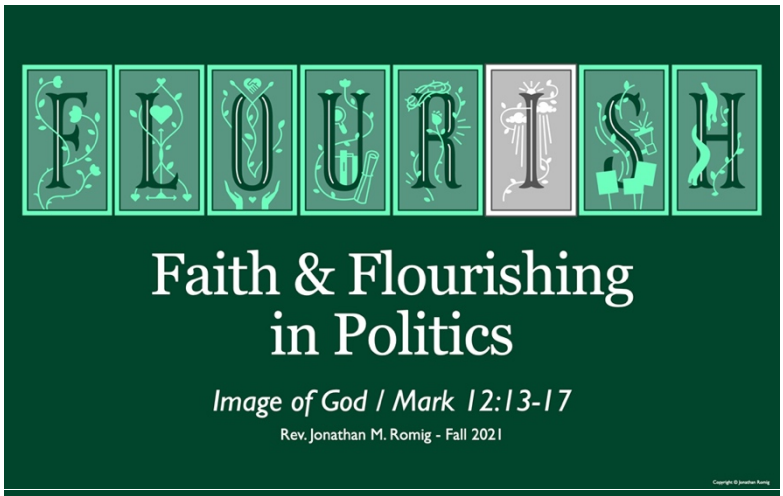
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 45–46, quoted in BIll Haslam, *Faithful Presence: The Promise and the Peril of Faith in the Public Square* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2021) 105, Kindle.

20. See Eugene Cho, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2020), 74, Kindle.

21. Matthew 17:24-27.

#7 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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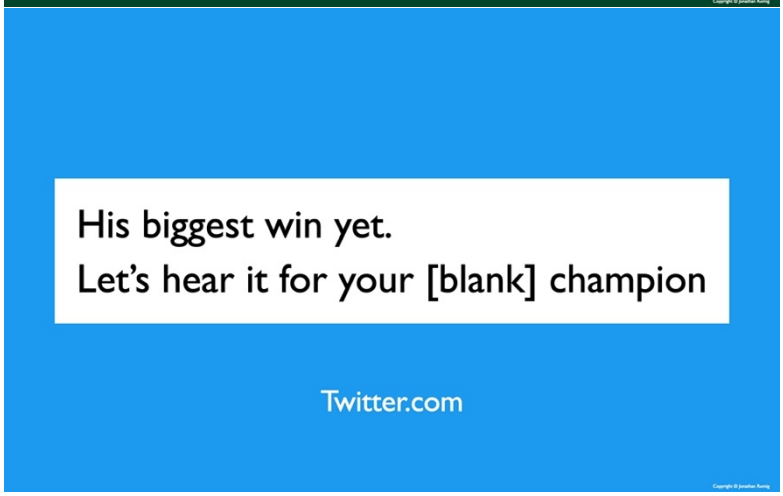

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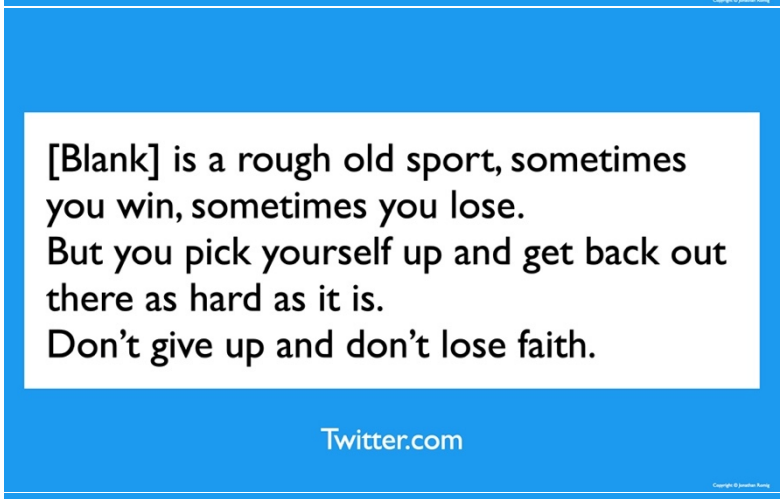

[Blank] is a rough old sport, sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.
But you pick yourself up and get back out there as hard as it is.
Don't give up and don't lose faith.
Twitter.com

Slide 6

Slide 7

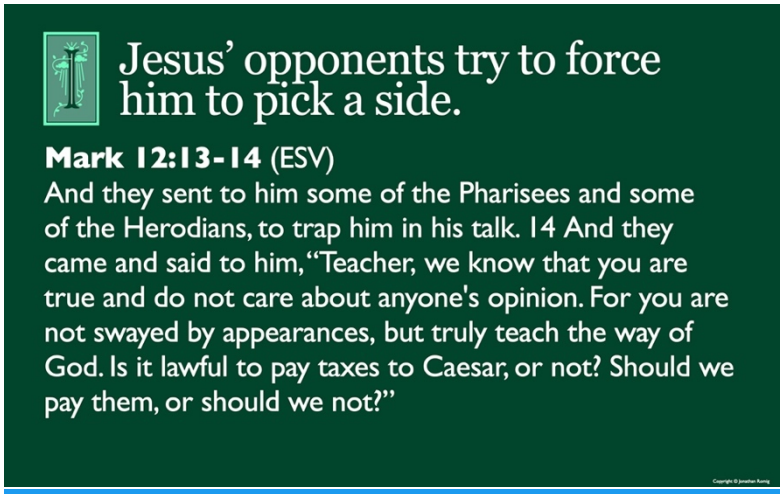
Slide 8

Joshua 5:13-14 (ESV)
When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" 14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

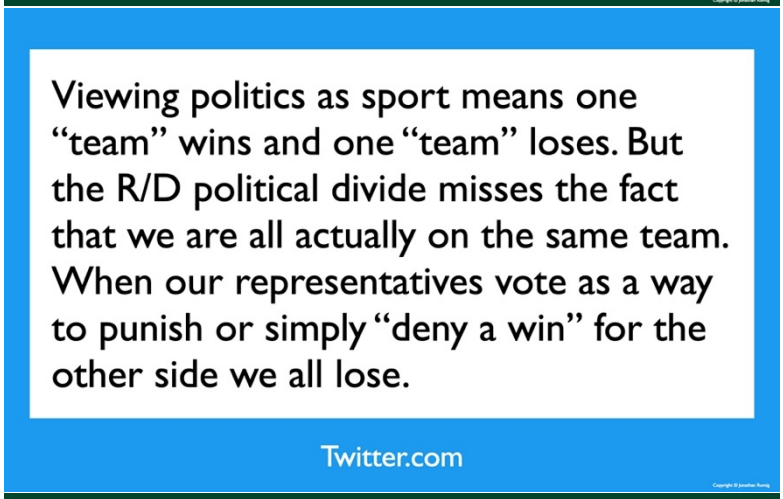
Slide 9

Jesus' opponents try to force him to pick a side.

Slide 10


Jesus' opponents try to force him to pick a side.
Mark 12:13-14 (ESV)
And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. 14 And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"

Slide 11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Twitter.com

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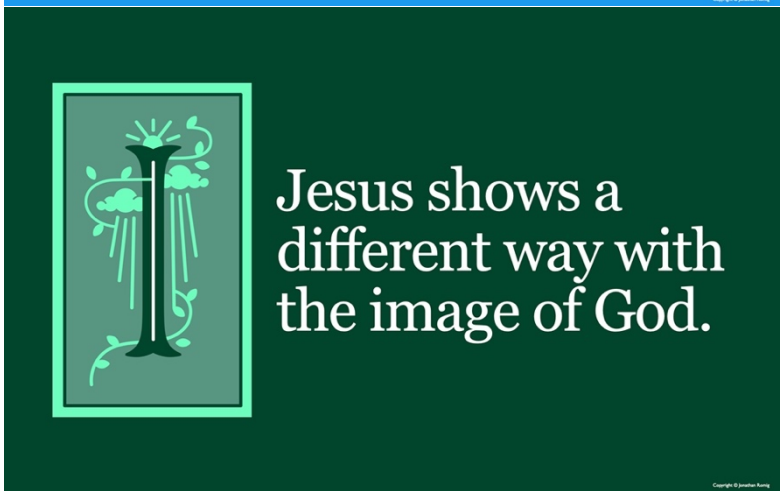

Slide 13

Jesus shows a different way with the image of God.

Mark 12:15-17 (ESV)
But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." 17 Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

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Slide 14

Jesus shows a different way with the image of God.

1. Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry.

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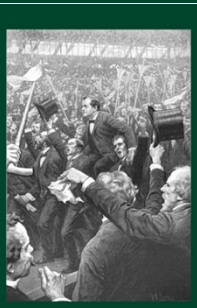
Slide 15



By William Robinson Leigh - McClure's Magazine, April 1900, p. 536., Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=55627598

If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.

- Presidential Candidate, Williams Jennings

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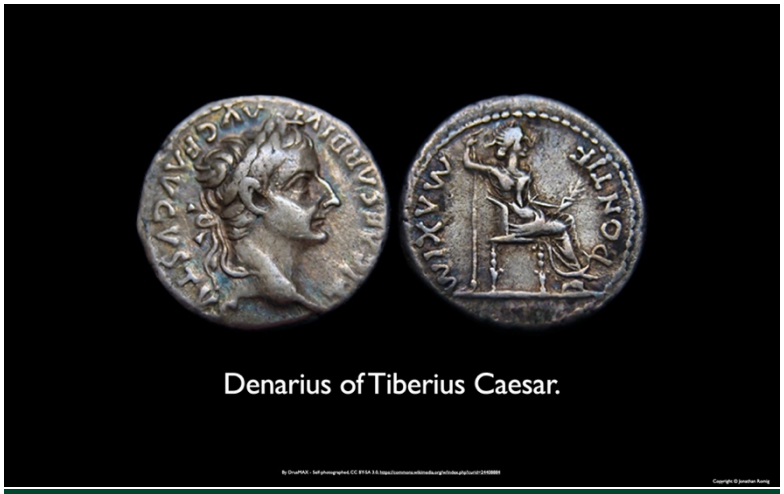

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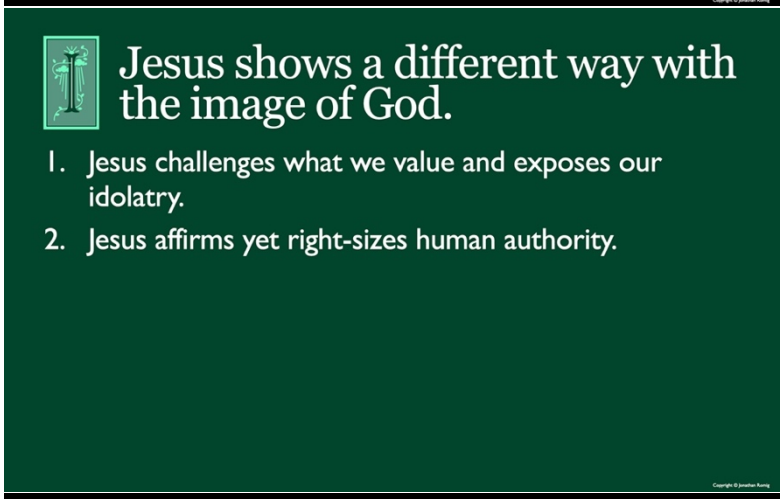
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2. Jesus affirms yet right-sizes human authority.

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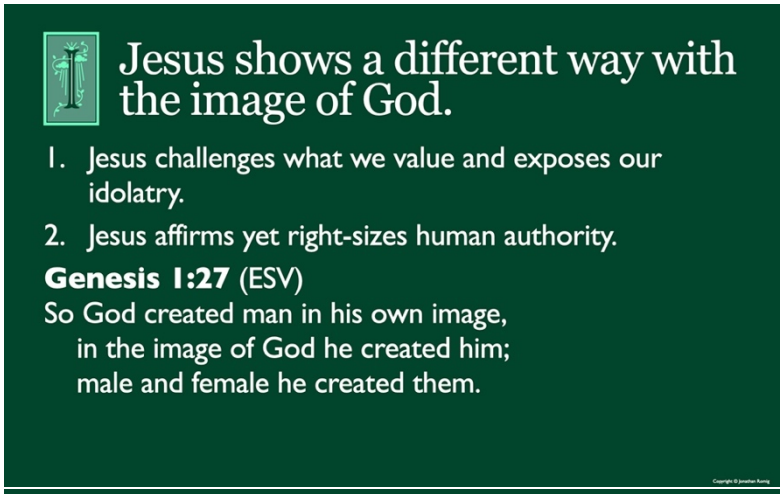
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Genesis 1:27 (ESV)
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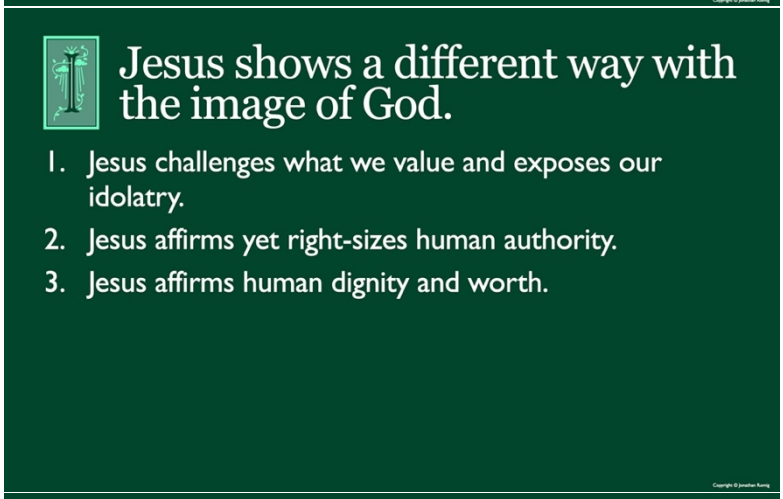
Slide 20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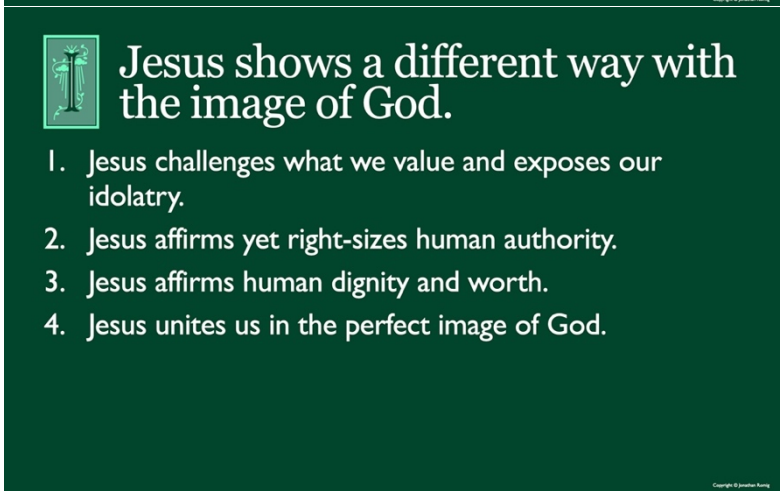
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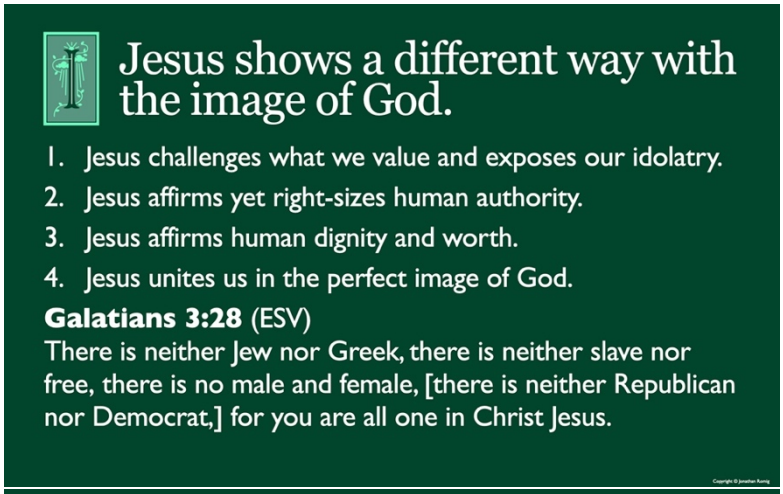
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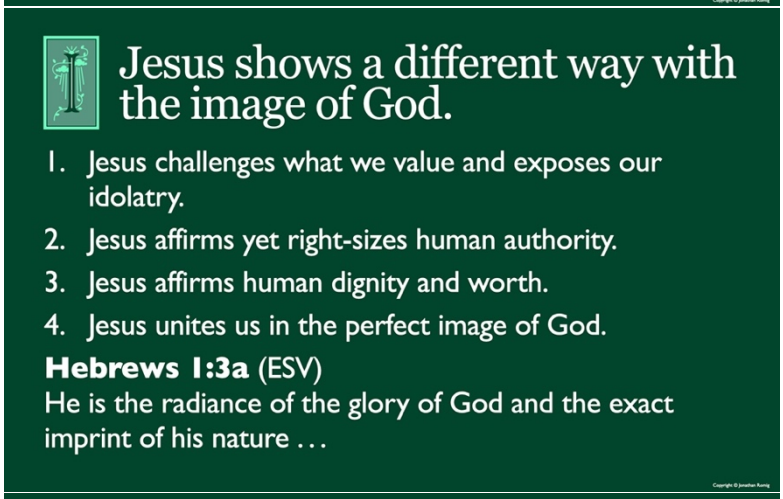
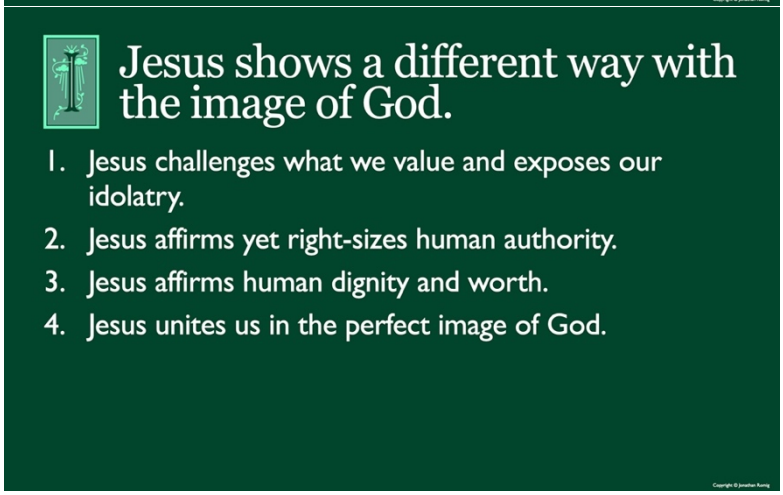
Galatians 3:28 (ESV)
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, [there is neither Republican nor Democrat,] for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Slide 23


Jesus shows a different way with the image of God.
1. Jesus challenges what we value and exposes our idolatry.
2. Jesus affirms yet right-sizes human authority.
3. Jesus affirms human dignity and worth.
4. Jesus unites us in the perfect image of God.
Hebrews 1:3a (ESV)
He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature …

Slide 24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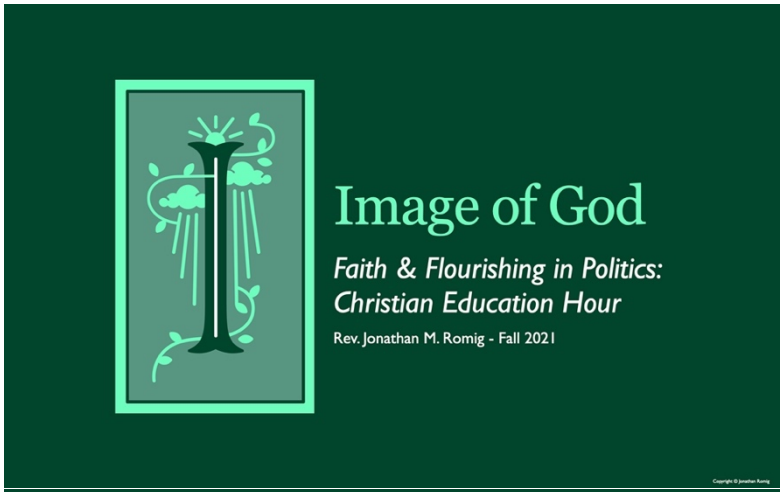
#7 Christian Education Slides

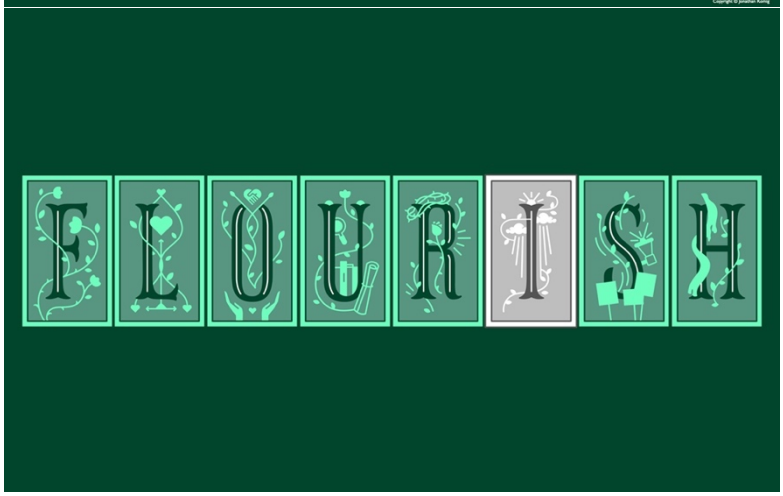
Slide 1



Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray in preparation and silently while we discuss. Fruit is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

Slide 3



Slide 4

Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (ESV)

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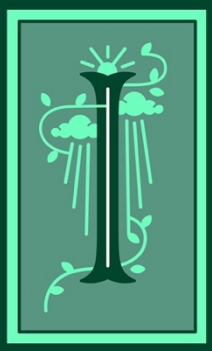
Slide 5



What does it mean to be made in the image of God (*Imago Dei*)?

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Slide 6

The Bible, however, distinguishes human creatures from animals, birds, and fish. Humans have been created to walk and talk and work with God as high officials in God's creation-kingdom. We bear the kind of responsibility that belongs to no other creature. We have been created to love, serve, and reveal God through our friendships, marriages, families, development of the earth, education of young people, and, yes, governing of creation.

James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction* (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) 21, Kindle.

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Slide 7

God gave humans the dignified status of being created in his image. But this status comes with responsibility. According to Genesis 1:28, quoted above, God told humans to fill the earth and to subdue and rule it. This verse uses royal language in order to communicate the fact that humans are God's royal representatives in the rest of creation. As benevolent agents of God's royal rule, humans have the responsibility to take care of creation.

Tremper Longman, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020) 55, Kindle.

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Slide 8

Co-reign with Christ

God created humanity to rule with him, which his people will do for all eternity.

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV)

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

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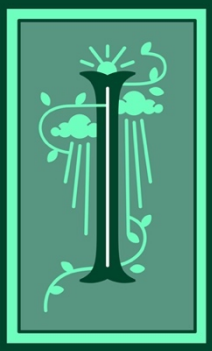
Slide 9



How can the doctrine of the image of God influence our political engagement?

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Slide 10

How can the doctrine of the image of God influence our political engagement?

Politics and policy matter because people matter.

"But for Christians, politics is not important because we ascribe great value to political ideas, but because we ascribe great value to the human person."

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 2, Kindle.

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Slide 11

And doing justice is likewise the means to an end—shalom, that rich Hebrew word for peace, describing the conditions where every creature can be fully, truly, gloriously itself, most of all where God's own image bearers bear that image in all its fullness, variety and capacity. The work of justice is to restore the conditions that make image bearing possible.

Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 80, Kindle.

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Slide 12

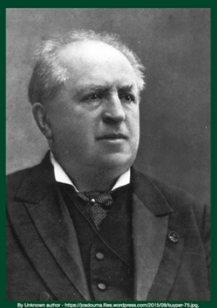
Abraham Kuyper

Refored theologian, pastor & Dutch politician (1837-1920)

Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905)

Known for concept of *sphere sovereignty*.

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"



By Unknown author - https://joedsouma.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/kuyper-75.jpg, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43002601

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Slide 13

"Kuyper's confessional Christian worldview means every human being is made in the image of God and, therefore, everyone deserves equal dignity, care, and compassion."

"The proper functioning of the social and economic spheres must be marked by justice and faithfulness: each person, created in the image and likeness of God, has a right to their fair share of the economic resources of God's creation within human society."

"Because Christ is Lord, no person (Christian or non-Christian) should be treated by the government or the legislative process or economic policy or employer as less than an image-bearer of God."

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 3, Kindle.

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Slide 14

Idolatry in Scripture

Exodus 20:2-3 (ESV)

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

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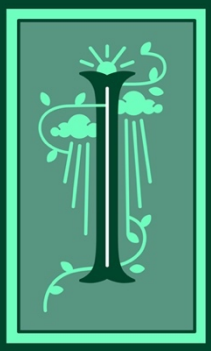
Slide 15



What is idolatry and what is its impact on the image of God?

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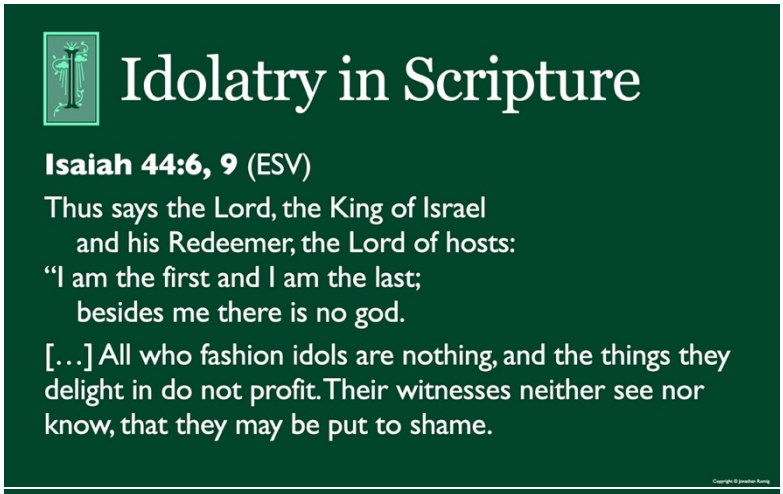
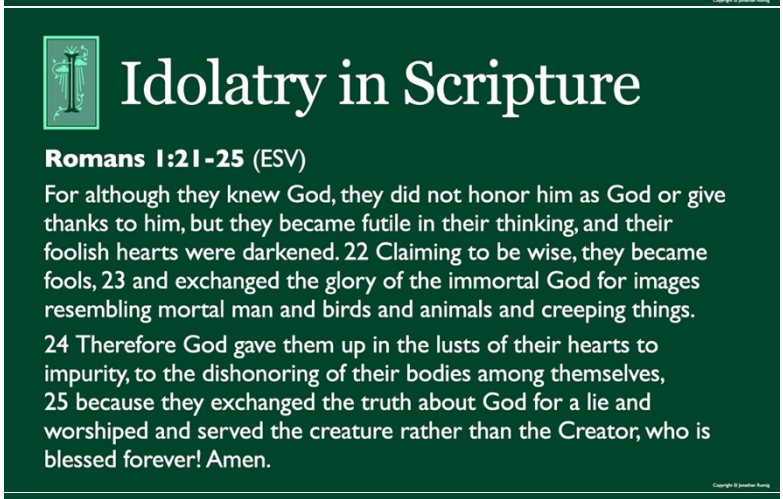
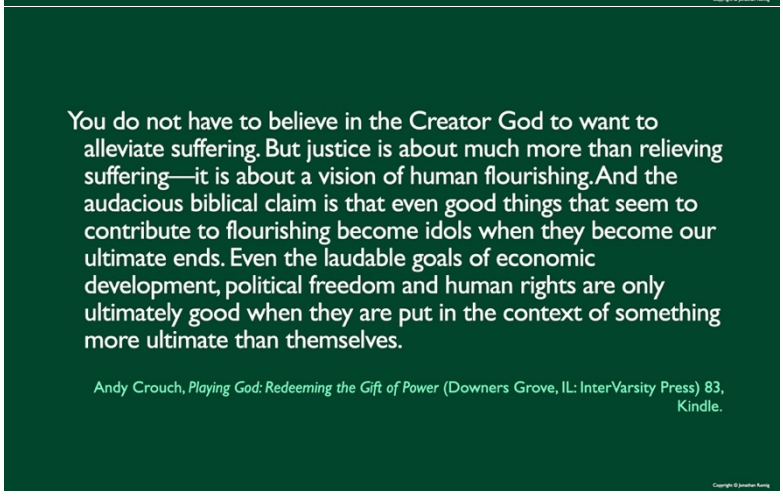
Slide 16


Idolatry in Scripture
Isaiah 44:6, 9 (ESV)
Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
"I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
[…] All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame.

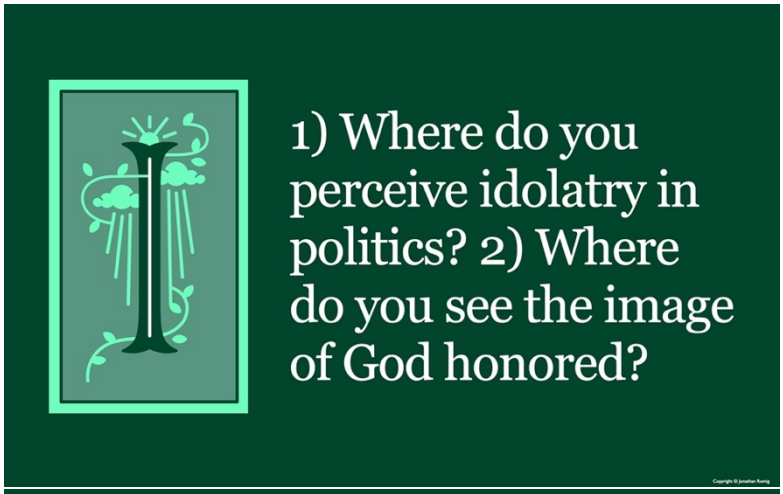
Slide 17


Idolatry in Scripture
Romans 1:21-25 (ESV)
For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,
25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Slide 18


You do not have to believe in the Creator God to want to alleviate suffering. But justice is about much more than relieving suffering—it is about a vision of human flourishing. And the audacious biblical claim is that even good things that seem to contribute to flourishing become idols when they become our ultimate ends. Even the laudable goals of economic development, political freedom and human rights are only ultimately good when they are put in the context of something more ultimate than themselves.
Andy Crouch, Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 83, Kindle.

Slide 19



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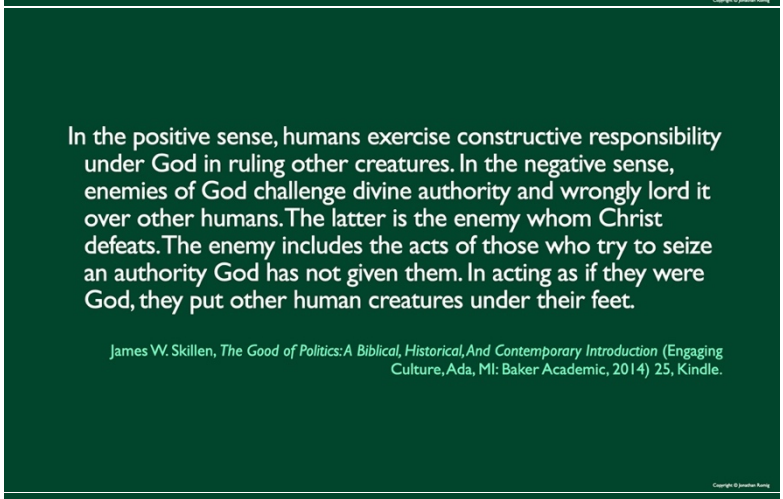
In the positive sense, humans exercise constructive responsibility under God in ruling other creatures. In the negative sense, enemies of God challenge divine authority and wrongly lord it over other humans. The latter is the enemy whom Christ defeats. The enemy includes the acts of those who try to seize an authority God has not given them. In acting as if they were God, they put other human creatures under their feet.
James W. Skillen, The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) 25, Kindle.

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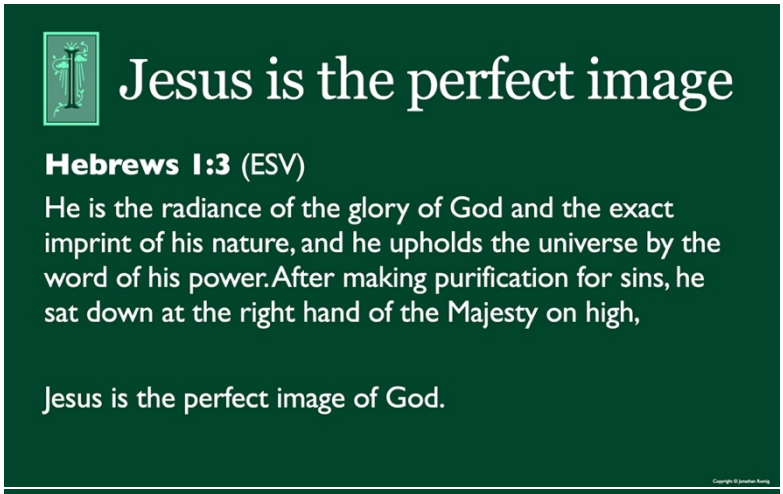
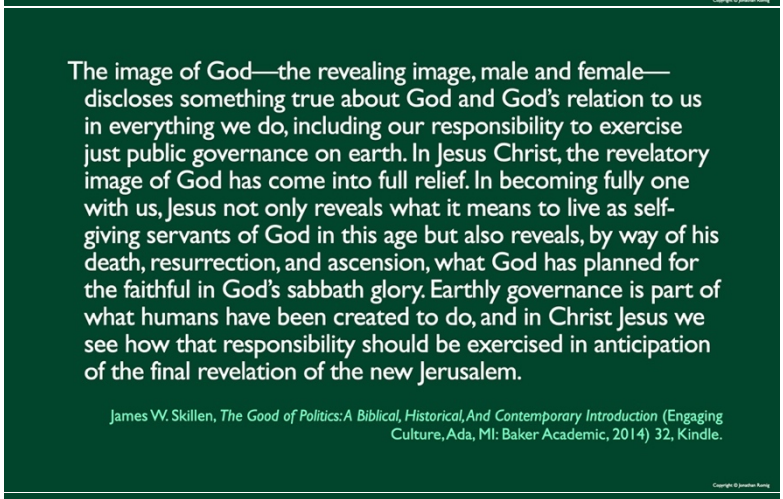
Slide 22


Jesus is the perfect image
Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)
He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
Jesus is the perfect image of God.

Slide 23


The image of God—the revealing image, male and female—discloses something true about God and God's relation to us in everything we do, including our responsibility to exercise just public governance on earth. In Jesus Christ, the revelatory image of God has come into full relief. In becoming fully one with us, Jesus not only reveals what it means to live as self-giving servants of God in this age but also reveals, by way of his death, resurrection, and ascension, what God has planned for the faithful in God's sabbath glory. Earthly governance is part of what humans have been created to do, and in Christ Jesus we see how that responsibility should be exercised in anticipation of the final revelation of the new Jerusalem.
James W. Skillen, The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, And Contemporary Introduction (Engaging Culture, Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014) 32, Kindle.

Slide 24

Amos 5:21-24

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Speak Prophetically

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / November 21st, 2021

(S1-2) On the morning of Thursday, February 3rd, 1994, a room of political and religious elite gathered in the ballroom of a swanky hotel in downtown Washington DC. **(S3)** Members of Congress were there, as was the President and Vice President, Bill Clinton and Al Gore, Hilary too. But there was also someone there you might not expect, Mother Teresa.

An 83-year-old nun from India, Mother Teresa had spent a lifetime caring for the poor and needy in the slums of Calcutta, the malnourished and thrown away. She'd received the Noble Peace Prize in 1979, but she still didn't fit the suits and ties in that room with her humble blue and white nun's habit. But today was the National Prayer Breakfast, and they had invited Mother Teresa to speak.[1]

(S4) And when Mother Teresa got up to talk, you could barely see her head over the podium, engraved with the Presidential Seal of the United States. And two big black microphones rested right on her forehead.[2] You couldn't see her face until she turned to the side. But although she looked frail, she spoke with power.

(S5) She began by talking about the importance of love and how, starting with the family, we are to live lives of love for God and neighbor. But we're not to just say we love God, but to show it by sacrificing for our neighbor. Mother Teresa called her audience to "be willing to give until it hurts."[3] And something about that rang true, didn't it? Because she had lived a life of giving until it hurt.

That gave weight to her next words as she spoke out prophetically against children putting their parents in nursing homes and forgetting them, as she spoke out against boys and girls taking drugs, and as she spoke out against abortion. She said, "But I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because Jesus said, 'If you receive a little child, you receive me.'"[4] Long and resounding applause filled the ballroom.

If you were in that room behind that podium surrounded by some of the most powerful men and women in the world, would you speak truth to power? Would you speak prophetically? That's what "S" in "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H" stands for, "Speak Prophetically." Most of us are never going to have a chance to do what Mother Teresa did. But we do have opportunities every day, small opportunities to speak prophetically, to speak truth to power in our contexts, in our families, jobs, and communities. Maybe if we are faithful in those little moments, God will call us to speak up in the big moments too.[5]

During the Ockenga Fellows Program, we talked about the concept of "faithful presence." My black brothers and sisters in Christ pointed out that sometimes Christians need to speak up and advocate for justice, even specific policies. **(S6)** Believers need to exercise not just "faithful presence" but "faithful prophetic presence."[6] We need to be faithful to Jesus, present where he

has us and speak with boldness and courage. Faithful presence can be too passive.[7] Sometimes faithful presence needs prophetic power.

(S7) To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power.

The Hebrew Bible is full of the writings of prophets and stories of prophets speaking God's truth to the powers that be, whether governors and kings or cities and nations. To speak prophetically sometimes meant "future-telling," but most often, it meant "truth-telling." Not just, "This is going to happen in the future," but "Here are the consequences that are going to happen if you break God's laws." The prophets were God's covenant lawyers who reminded his people of the terms of their covenant agreement. If you honor and obey me, I will bless you, but I will curse you if you dishonor and disobey me.[8] The prophets didn't speak their own truth but God's truth to those in authority and the people as a whole.

We find many examples of prophets speaking God's truth to power throughout the Old Testament, Samuel to King Saul, Nathan to King David, Elijah to King Ahab, Isaiah to King Ahaz and Hezekiah, and our prophet today Amos to king Jeroboam II of northern Israel. But we also find other people speaking truth to power, and thus speaking prophetically, who weren't necessarily prophets, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with King Nebuchadnezzar and Esther with King Xerxes.

When the evil Haman plotted mass genocide against the Jews, God sovereignly directed a young Jewish woman named Esther to become the king's wife. Her uncle Mordecai recognized that God had put her in her position for "such a time as this."[9] What if she remained silent? God would have raised someone else, but many Jews may have perished. The New Testament author James likewise says:

> **(S8) James 4:17** (ESV)
> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

James says that part of being a follower of Jesus is recognizing opportunities to do good and taking them. Could that include speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves? If we see our government hurting the common good and working against shalom and flourishing, shouldn't we say something? Could we go so far as to ask if not speaking up is a form of disobeying Jesus' command to love our neighbor? Wouldn't silence in our democratic context mean we missed an opportunity to do good, as James says?

(S9) Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, ". . . the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."[10] Appalling silence! As MLK stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, he delivered his prophetic speech, "I Have a Dream." In his speech, he spoke of black poverty, voting rights, police brutality, and biblical justice.[11] As he preached, he quoted the prophet, Amos.

> **(S10) Amos 5:24** (ASV)
> "But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Biblical justice and biblical righteousness are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have a just community without a right relationship with God or a right relationship with God without a just community.[12] MLK understood justice and righteousness are a pair and spoke for both as he stood on the Washington Mall and met privately with President Lyndon B. Johnson to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The prophet Amos wasn't a professional prophet. He wasn't what we might call ordained clergy today—no "Rev." in his title. Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa. God can use anyone to speak his truth to power, and that is what Amos did. **(S11-MAP)** Even though Amos lived in Southern Judah near Jerusalem, God gave him a message for six outside nations. Amos preached against Damascus (Aram), Gaza (Philistines), Tyre (Phoenicia), Edom, Ammon, and Moab for their violence, their slavery, their wicked religious practices, and their abuses of pregnant women. Amos not only speaks truth to outside nations, but his own as well, to Judah for breaking God's covenant and to northern Israel for oppressing the poor, weak, and vulnerable.[13]

Amos spent most of his prophetic message addressing the northern tribe of Israel, and for his faithfulness to God, he was called a conspirator (Amos 7:10). Amos dared to speak directly against the king of Samaria, Jeroboam II. And for that, a false priest named Amaziah, a priest at Bethel where the Israelites had erected a golden calf told Amos to go home (c.f., 1 Kings 12:25-33).

> **(S12) Amos 7:12-13** (ESV)
> And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

"Stay away from the king and temple because you're threatening our civil religion!" The palace and temple combine to form a new idolatrous religion. **(S13)** Civil religion is when a state enmeshes itself in religion, and religion embraces the state to extend both their power. The consequence for Israel and any nation that does this is a watered-down faith and injustices.[14] God called Amos to speak out against Israel's religious and political corruption, and he calls us to speak out against a politicized faith and injustices in our context today. Without separation from the state, the church can't speak prophetically to the state.

One of the biggest supporters of apartheid in South Africa was the Reformed Church. They created theological arguments defending the division of land among the races and then persecuted those who spoke out against it.[15] That's not so different from many churches in the south during slavery. Or how about the faith leaders on both sides of the political aisle, who, once they've endorsed a political candidate, find it difficult to speak out against immoral activity or unjust policies?[16] Amos is confronting the same religious and political mixing of powers in his time, and while it's intimidating, he doesn't do it alone.

(S14) To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power.

God empowers the prophet Amos to deliver a prophetic rebuke. Amos isn't rebuking the nations and the king of Israel because of his own innate sense of justice, but because God has communicated to him true justice. Amos has a higher mandate than a political party or social cause. He has the word of God. The phrase "says the Lord" appears 21 times in Amos's nine

chapters. Amos makes clear this message didn't come from him but God. When the false priest Amaziah tries to send Amos packing, he points to God's calling:

> **(S15) Amos 7:14-15** (ESV)
> Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

God sent Amos. Amos is not speaking in his own power, but God has empowered him. If it was up to Amos, he might still be with his sheep. God might call you to speak truth to power. He might call you into politics in our city, state, or nation or to speak up at a smaller level for an injustice you see at school or even in your own family. You might think, "I could never do that," but if God has called you, he will empower you with his Holy Spirit and God's word to say what he wants you to say.[17] God gives prophetic power.

But you will also need to check yourself. Are you speaking your personal opinion or God's words? For us to speak prophetically is not to speak my truth, but God's truth grounded in scripture. Something I noticed about Mother Teresa's speech was that it was full of scripture. She paraphrased verses from Matthew, John, 1 John, and Isaiah 11 times.[18] Her prophetic message didn't come from watching an abundance of YouTube videos, or reading New York Times articles, or even from listening to the Holy Post podcast (a personal favorite), but was an overflow of her love for scripture. When we claim to speak prophetically, how many of us are actually speaking God's truth directed by the Holy Spirit, not just personal opinions?

I still believe in the prophetic office in the New Testament.[19] I don't think prophets today create scripture as Amos did, but part of their role, apart from future-telling, is to remind people of Jesus' new covenant and the way we're supposed to live by it outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. We hold ourselves, our churches, and our politicians up to the flame of Matthew 5-7 and call us all to love God, neighbor, and enemy.

Just like we need wisdom to set public policy, we need the Holy Spirit to help us determine when to speak prophetically. But I think sometimes we try to speak prophetically in the public square without actually being called by the Holy Spirit to do so. It's so easy for righteous zeal to turn into self-righteous anger.

> **(S16) James 1:19-20** (ESV)
> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

It's so easy to convince ourselves that we're mad because God is mad. But James warns us to slow down because our anger isn't the same as God's anger.

> **(S17)** "The problem with carnal anger and outrage is that it's one of the easiest sins to commit while convincing oneself that one is being faithful. . . . Rage is no sign of authority, prophetic or otherwise."[20] – *Onward* by Russell Moore

The power of prophetic power is not anger or rage but the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit empowers our speech, it should be accompanied by the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience…" (Galatians 5:22-23). Watching the video of Mother Teresa, I think that's one of the

things that gave her prophetic message so much power. You could see and hear and feel the love she had, the joy, the peace, and the incredible patience. She didn't yell at the President. She encouraged everyone to love each other. And that's why we speak, out of love for others. *To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power.*

(S18) We speak prophetically out of love for our neighbor.

Let's take a moment to take a bird's-eye view of the book of Amos. If we do, we find that Amos doesn't advocate for himself or the rights of sheepherders but for the poor and most vulnerable. He speaks for the good of his neighbors. When Amos first addresses Israel, he rebukes their injustices and unrighteousness:

> **(S19) Amos 2:6-7** (ESV)
> Thus says the Lord:
>
> "For three transgressions of Israel,
> and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
> because they sell the righteous for silver,
> and the needy for a pair of sandals—
> those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth
> and turn aside the way of the afflicted;
> a man and his father go in to the same girl,
> so that my holy name is profaned;

Israel has sold the poor for a pair of sandals. Amos challenges Israel's unbridled materialism, abuse of the poor, their sexual immorality, their religious sacrilege. I wonder what Amos would think of my love of smart technology? Would he point how abusive cobalt mining in the congo makes so many electronic processors possible in cars, phones, and computers?[21] Amos is not afraid to call out the wealthy, not for having money, but for how they got their riches and what they do with them once they have it.

> **(S20) Amos 4:1** (ESV)
> "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,
> who are on the mountain of Samaria,
> who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
> who say to your husbands, 'Bring, that we may drink!'

Samaria is Israel's capital, and it is full of men and women who crush the poor and drink their fill. They are the kind of people who don't want to see justice done in court, who detest the truth, and who raise taxes on the poor. Though they acquire much, God's wrath will come on them.

> **(S21) Amos 5:10-11** (ESV)
> They hate him who reproves in the gate,
> and they abhor him who speaks the truth.
> Therefore because you trample on the poor
> and you exact taxes of grain from him,
> you have built houses of hewn stone,
> but you shall not dwell in them;

you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

What kind of people would do something like this? Maybe we're thinking, "If only they read their Hebrew Bibles, the Old Testament, they wouldn't act this way. If only they went to church, they'd be good people." Here's the kicker. The people committing injustice are the most religious, which brings us to today's text:

(S22) Amos 5:21-24 (ESV)
"I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

This should terrify us. Amos rebukes those most like us, church-goers. They're the kind of people who give their tithes and offerings, sing hymns and worship songs, and look like good Christians on the outside. But they have divided righteousness from justice, which corrupts both. God wants our love but also wants us to love our neighbor. And if we don't love our neighbor, we do not love him.

Before the church ever speaks prophetically to the world, we need to make sure we live prophetically in the world. Next week we'll look closer at Jesus' call to care for the poor and needy in Matthew 25. It's good that today we're seeing how the Old Testament prophets took this seriously too. We have to love our neighbor. As we love, we earn the credibility to stand up and address those in positions of authority for not loving their neighbors. Remember how Mother Teresa called out abortion? She added this:

> The beautiful gift God has given our congregation is to fight abortion by adoption. [. . .] We have given already from one house in Calcutta, over 3,000 children in adoption. And I can't tell you what joy, what love, what peace those children have brought into those families. It has been a real gift of God for them and for us. [. . .] And also I offer you, since our Sisters are here, anybody who doesn't want the child, please give it to me. I -- I want the child.
>
> I will tell you something beautiful. As I already told you, the abortion by adoption -- by care of the mother and adoption for her baby. We have saved thousands of lives. We have sent word to the clinics, to the hospitals and police stations: "Please don't destroy the child. We will take the child." So we always have someone tell the mothers in trouble: "Come, we will take -- take care of you. We will get a home for your child." [. . .]

> Please don't kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child.

Mother Teresa's prophetic words have power because she demonstrated love. She was not motivated by a political cause but by love for the neediest. *We speak prophetically out of love for our neighbor.*

Amos's prophetic rebuke was an expression of God's love not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles, those surrounding nations, Damascus, Edom, and the rest. In the end, Amos prophesied that northern Israel, Samaria, and all the surrounding nations have hope, but only through King David's line in Judah.

> **(S23) Amos 9:11-12** (ESV)
> "In that day I will raise up
> the booth of David that is fallen
> and repair its breaches,
> and raise up its ruins
> and rebuild it as in the days of old,
> that they may possess the remnant of Edom
> and all the nations who are called by my name,"
> declares the Lord who does this.

One will come to rescue Israel and Edom and all the nations who repent and seek the Lord.[22] A people of injustice and unrighteousness will be counted just and righteous as they call on the name of the king. We know that king, don't we? He is also a prophet who loved us so much he laid down his life for us, his enemy.

(S24) Prophetic power comes at the cost of self-sacrificial love.

You want to speak prophetically? Do you know what they did to the prophets? They sawed them in two, stoned them, murdered and mistreated them.[23] They lived lives of sadness and sorrow as they watched God's people disobey and reap the consequences. I think there's this idea that to be prophetic today is to flip tables like Jesus, to get angry and demand justice. Modern-day zeal includes social media attacks, shouting matches, flipping cars, putting a bumper sticker on your car or a yard sign in your lawn, or in my case, buying and wearing a t-shirt that says "Seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8" This cost me $20, but did it really cost me anything? I believe in its message, but it doesn't cost me much.

But when Jesus chased out the unjust money-changers and drove out the animals from the temple, he was provoking the wrath of the chief priests and religious elite so that they would crucify him (John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-17).[24] He drove out the lambs to become a lamb who could take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Jesus didn't flip tables because he felt marginalized or outraged, but to save us. Love was at the core of his prophetic action and must be the core of ours. Mother Teresa lived a life-of self-sacrificial love till the age of 87, and MLK lived the same till he was assassinated at 39.

Do you Amos's audience heard him and repented and sought God? Not right away. Northern Israel and its capital of Samaria were taken into exile for their sins. But Jesus did tell a parable we usually assume is based on fiction of a Good Samaritan who risked his life for the sake of another, who embodied self-sacrificial love and foreshadowed Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. God used Amos's prophetic ministry in ways he couldn't have imagined. *Prophetic power comes at the cost of self-sacrificial love*.

Benediction - **Amos 5:24** (ASV)
"But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my eighth sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *Speak Prophetically*. As we consider what it means to practice "faithful prophetic presence" in our contexts, here are a few ways to keep praying and processing:

Journal: Think of your context, your family, workplace, and community. What are some scriptural truths those contexts may need to hear? Do they need to hear more about God's righteousness, or his justice, or both? How have you spoken prophetically? Journal about that experience. Then, write about some missed opportunities or what you think the Holy Spirit might be asking you to do going forward. Write a prayer asking God for help to speak prophetically, in his timing, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Article: Read "We Need Prophets, Not Partisans" by Brett McCracken posted on *The Gospel Coalition* (March 2, 2020). You will notice many themes we've already talked about in our series, like how politics can form us spiritually, the concept of faithful presence, and a warning that being partisan is not being prophetic. McCracken explains what it means to speak prophetically in our world today and why it matters so much.

Listen & Read (sermon & book): Listen to Pastor and author Eugene Cho speak prophetically in his sermon, "Faith & Politics." YouTube: https://youtu.be/4PnxqTt4ekk (37:08) If you resonate with his sermon, you might check out his book, *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk: A Christian's Guide to Engaging Politics*, which is an intermediate read (240 pages) but well worth the effort. He speaks prophetically throughout the book.

Read (intermediate): You know I like Timothy Keller, right? I recently read *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* by Timothy Keller as part of my study of the book of Jonah. This changed the way I see the book of Jonah and helps clarify Christianity's prophetic presence in politics (256 pages).

Ponder: Here, I'm sharing three different speakers exercising prophetic speech in different ways and from different Christian traditions. Try listening to each one and answer these three questions: 1) What biblical truths are they saying? 2) What things are not as clearly biblical and I may disagree with? 3) How do I feel about the manner in which they speak? Does it make me more or less receptive? Here are the three:

> **#1 – Mother Teresa**: This humble nun served the most desperate in the streets of Calcutta, India. Listen as she speaks prophetically to the President of the United States (YouTube; Manuscript).
>
> **#2 – Martin Luther King, Jr.**: Maybe you've heard MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech before. Hear the fire in his voice once again as he advocates for liberty for all people (YouTube; Manuscript).
>
> **#3 – William Sloan Coffin**: I had not heard of Rev. Coffin until we discussed this interview in the GCTS Ockenga Fellows cohort. Listen to this UCC Minister's unabashed point-of-view (YouTube).

Worship: Listen to "Isaiah 58 + Purge Me" from *Urban Doxology*. If you'd like, you can read Isaiah 58 as the worship leader recites it. Take time to confess before the Lord any injustices you see in the world. Ask the Lord to reveal any participation in injustice in your own life. Praise God for always being just and true.

I know those are a lot of recommendations! I hope the ones you choose will help you love Jesus more and speak God's truth prophetically as the Holy Spirit empowers and guides.

With love,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

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1. "President Clinton at the National Prayer Breakfast (1994)," clintonlibrary42, YouTube, published August 5, 2016, accessed November 15, 2021 https://youtu.be/kiagkk3XeFU. Either a book or podcast mentioned this speech. I cannot remember.

2. "Mother Teresa @ National Prayer Breakfast," Geremia08, YouTube, published February 14, 2012, accessed November 15, 2021 https://youtu.be/OXn-wf5ylgo. Video courtesy CSPAN: https://www.c-span.org/video/?54274-1/national-prayer-breakfast.

3. "Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta: National Prayer Breakfast Address, delivered 3 February 1994, Washington Hotel, Washington, D.C." American Rhetoric: Online Speech Bank, accessed November 15, 2021 https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/motherteresanationalprayerbreakfast.htm.

4. "Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta . . ." American Rhetoric.

5. Kaitlyn Schiess said something similar to this on an episode of *The Holy Post* podcast.

6. Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," in *Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Faithful Presence Needs [. . .]," Kindle.

7. Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," Kindle.

8. Deuteronomy 28.

9. Esther 4:14.

10. "Appalling Silence of the Good People," Quote Investigator, published June 17, 2020, accessed November 20, 2021 https://quoteinvestigator.com/2020/06/17/good/. This quote is attributed to MLK's "Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story" in 1958.

11. "Martin Luther King, Jr. I Have a Dream: delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.," American Rhetoric: Top 100 Speeches, accessed November 15, 2021 https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm.

12. See Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12.

13. Amos 1-2.

14. Gary Scott Smith, "Civil Religion in America," ChrisitanityToday, published 2008, accessed November 20, 2021 https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-99/civil-religion-in-america.html. Originally published in Christian History & Biography, Issue 99: Faith & the American Presidency, 2008.

15. Kevin Giles, "Justifying Injustice with the Bible: Apartheid," Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), published April 20, 2016, accessed November 20, 2021 https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/justifying-injustice-bible-apartheid.

16. See Chapter 1, "Thou Shalt Not Go To Bed With Political Parties" in *Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk* by Eugene Cho.

17. Luke 12:11-12 (ESV) And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

18. "Saint Mother Teresa . . ." American Rhetoric. See the footnotes.

19. Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29; Ephesians 4:11-12.

20. Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 2, Kindle.

21. John Campbell, "Why Cobalt Mining in the DRC Needs Urgent Attention," Council on Foreign Relations, published October 29, 2020, accessed November 18, 2021 https://www.cfr.org/blog/why-cobalt-mining-drc-needs-urgent-attention.

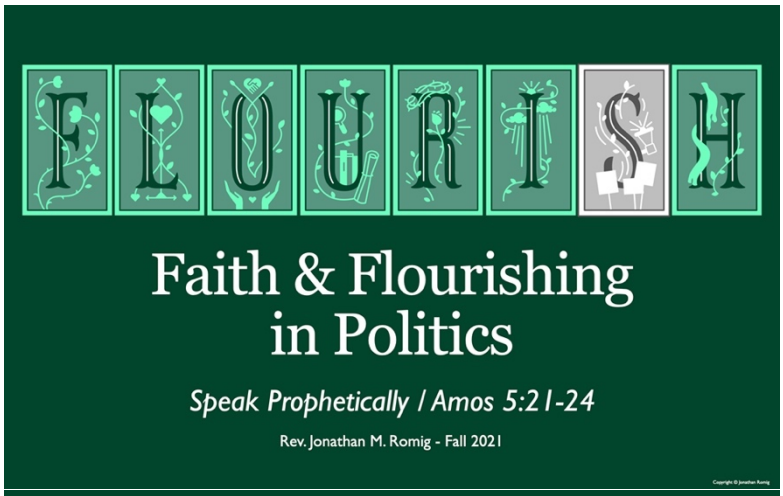
22. "Seek me and live" See Amos 5:4, 6 for the concept of repentance.

23. Nehemiah 9:26; Matthew 21:35; 22:6; 23:31, 37; Romans 11:3; Hebrews 11:37.

24. Skye Jethani said something similar to this on an episode of *The Holy Post* podcast.

#8 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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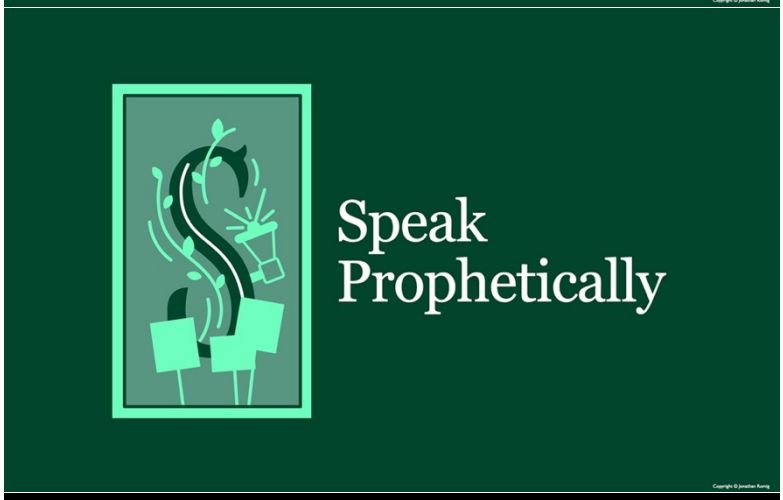

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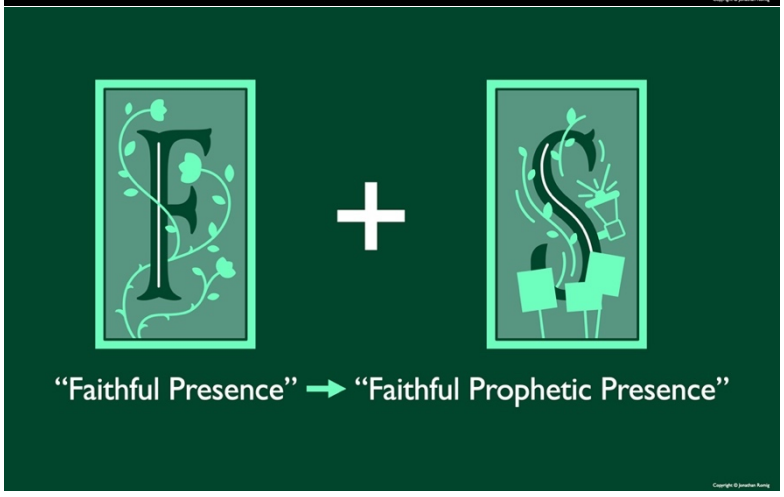

Slide 7

To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power.

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Slide 8

To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power.

James 4:17 (ESV)
So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

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Slide 9

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_a_Dream#/media/File:Martin_Luther_King_-_March_on_Washington.jpg
Photo above from "I Have a Dream" speech. Quote below from Stride Toward Freedom The Montgomery Story

"…the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

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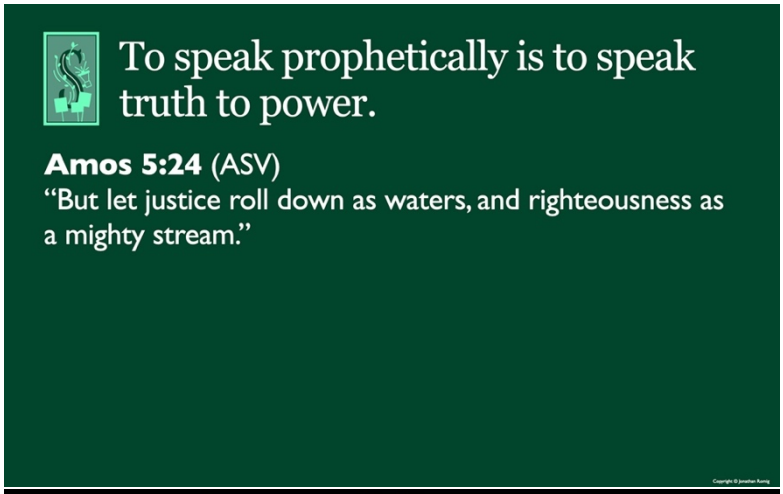
Slide 10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Amos 5:24 (ASV)
"But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

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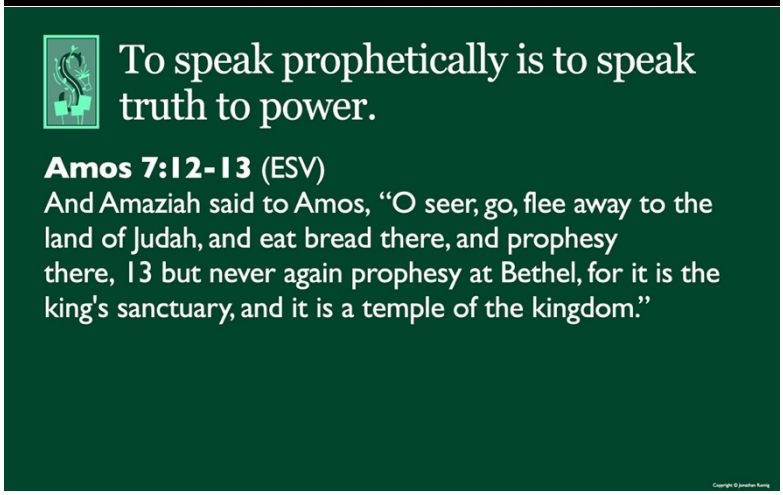
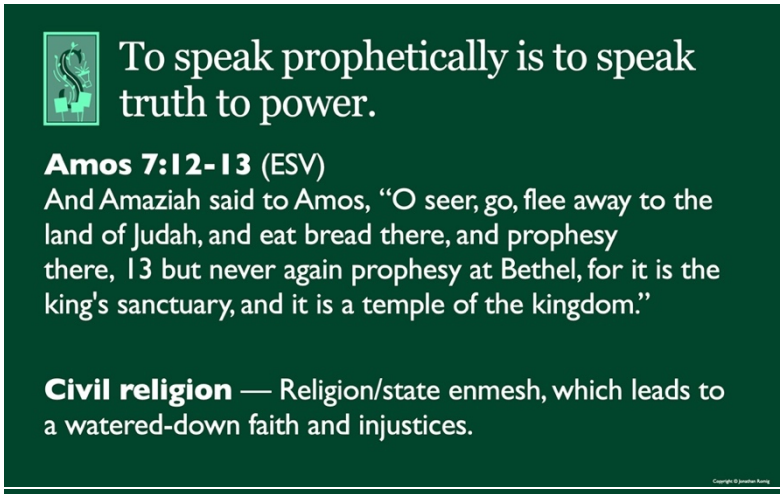
Slide 12


To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power.
Amos 7:12-13 (ESV)
And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Slide 13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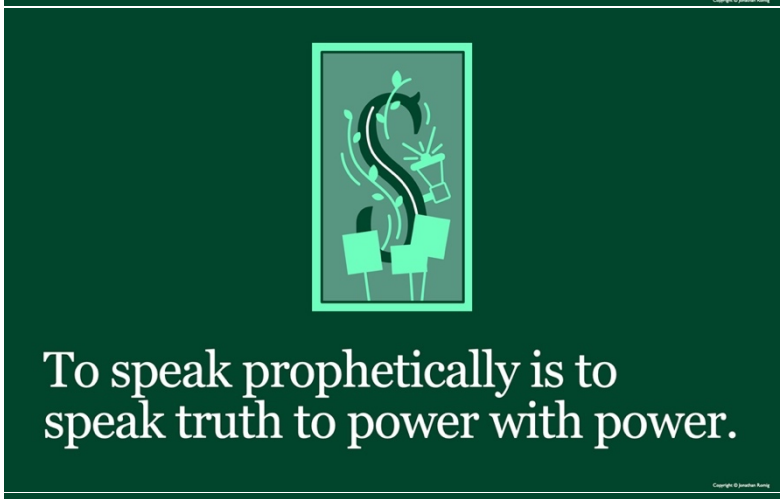
Civil religion — Religion/state enmesh, which leads to a watered-down faith and injustices.

Slide 14



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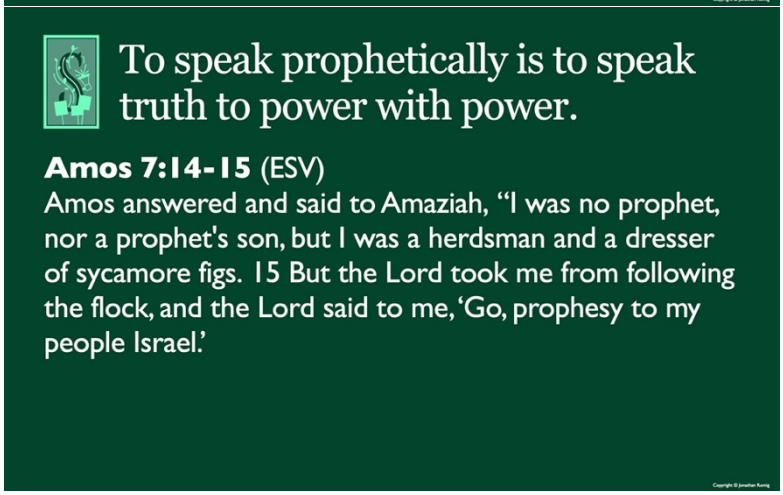
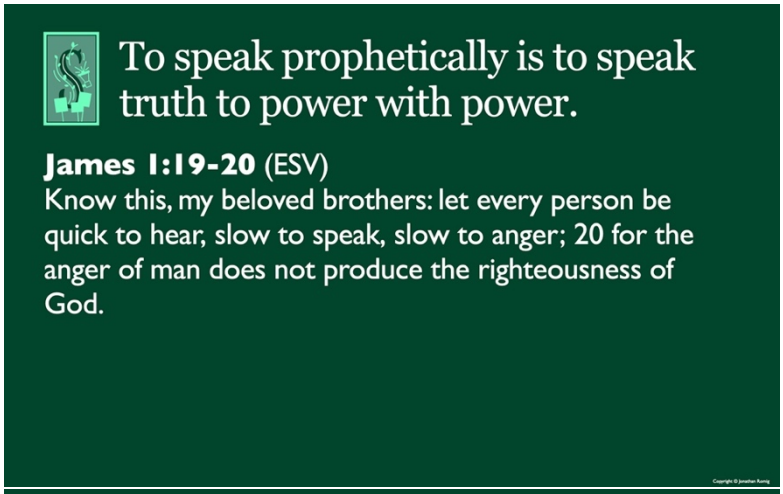
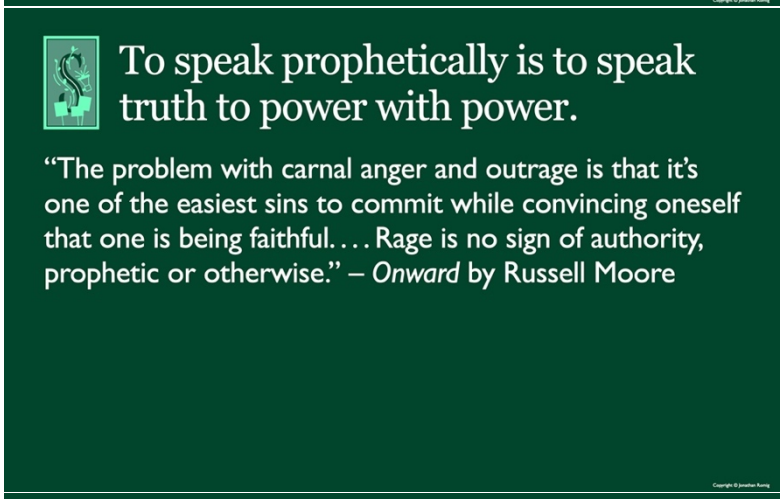

To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power.
Amos 7:14-15 (ESV)
Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

Slide 16


To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power.
James 1:19-20 (ESV)
Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Slide 17


To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power.
"The problem with carnal anger and outrage is that it's one of the easiest sins to commit while convincing oneself that one is being faithful. . . . Rage is no sign of authority, prophetic or otherwise." – Onward by Russell Moore

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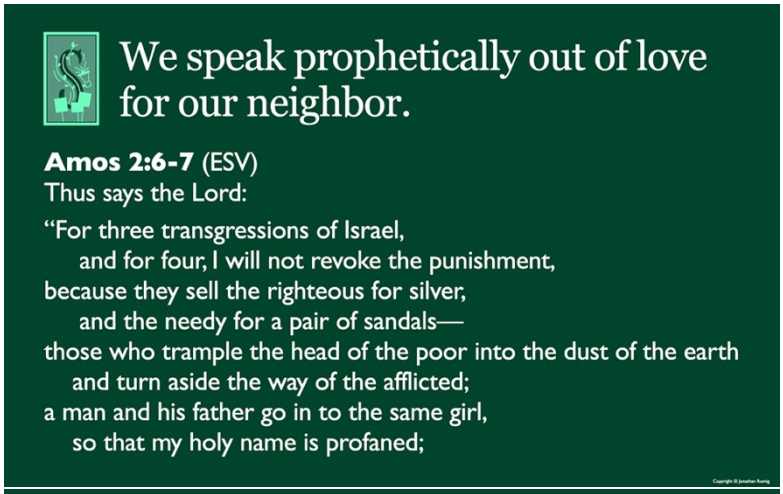
Slide 19


We speak prophetically out of love for our neighbor.
Amos 2:6-7 (ESV)
Thus says the Lord:
"For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth
and turn aside the way of the afflicted;
a man and his father go in to the same girl,
so that my holy name is profaned;

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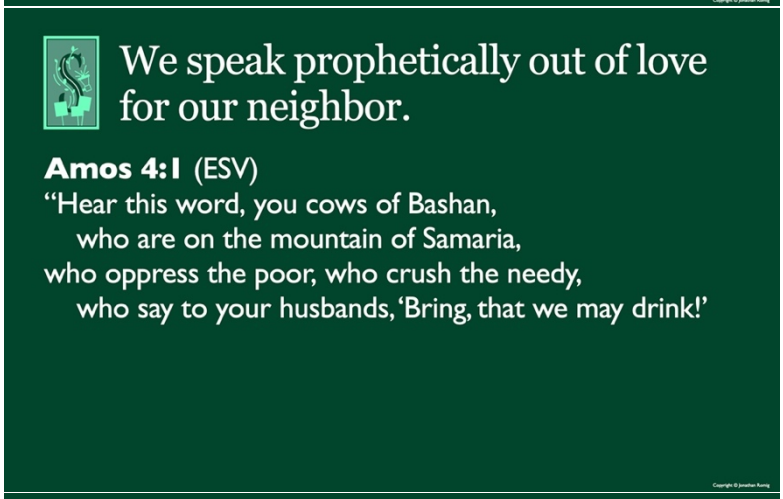
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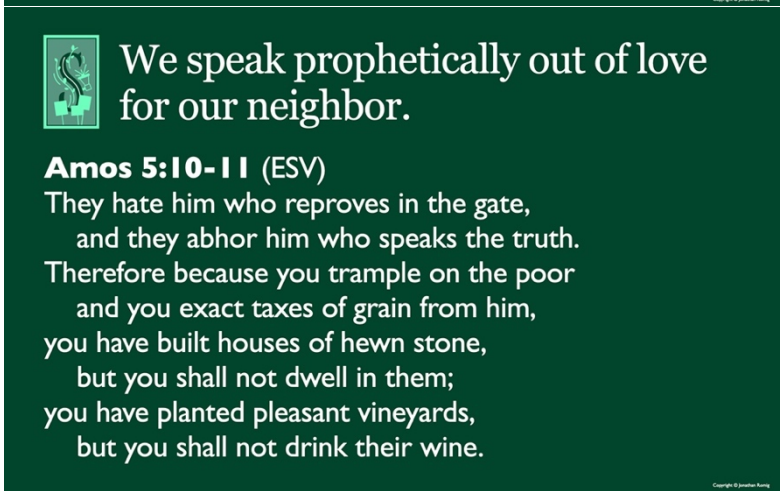
Slide 21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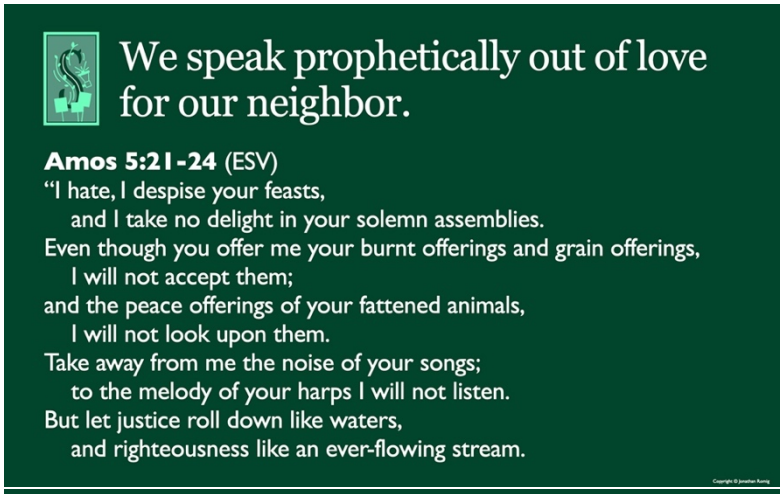
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Take away from me the noise of your songs;
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But let justice roll down like waters,
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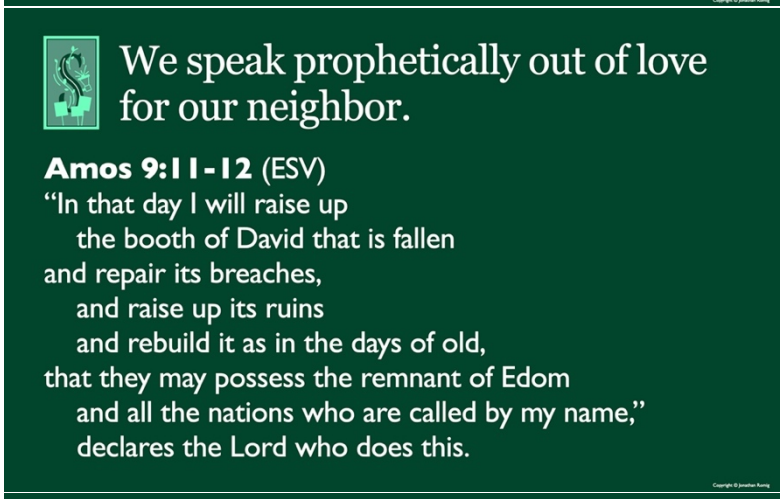
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Amos 9:11-12 (ESV)
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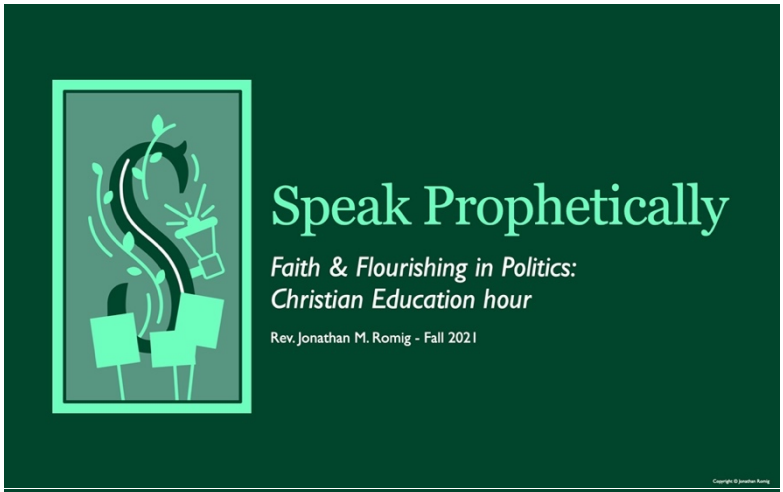
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins
and rebuild it as in the days of old,
that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,"
declares the Lord who does this.

Slide 24

#8 Christian Education Slides

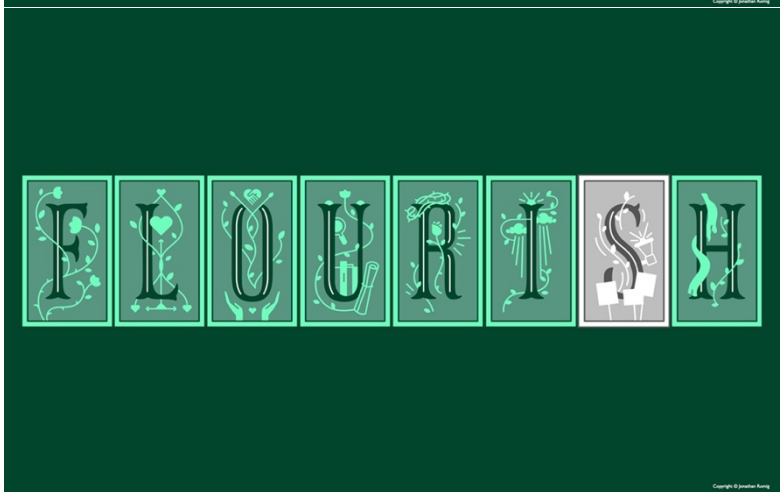
Slide 1



Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray for the Holy Spirit to be present and to bear fruit through our discussion.

Slide 3



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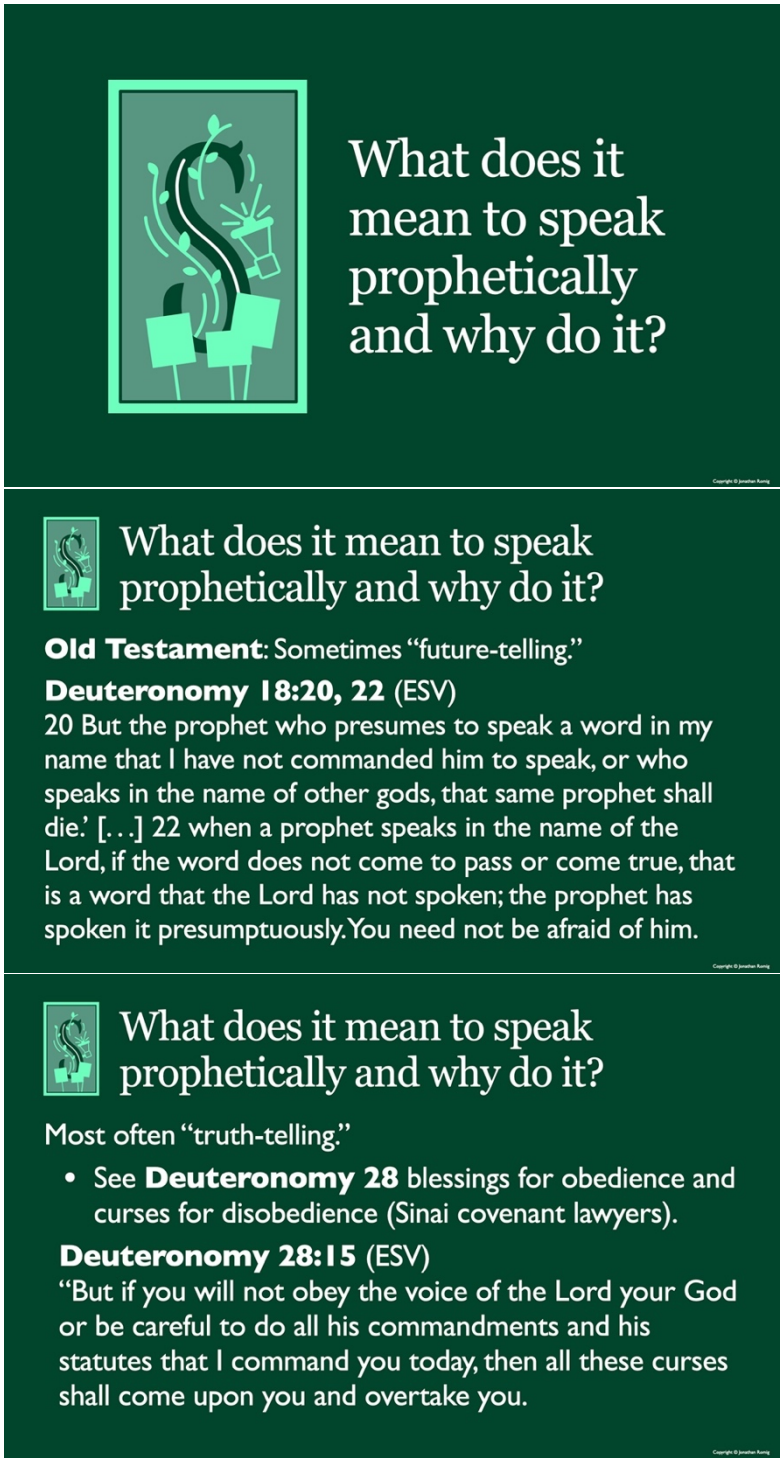
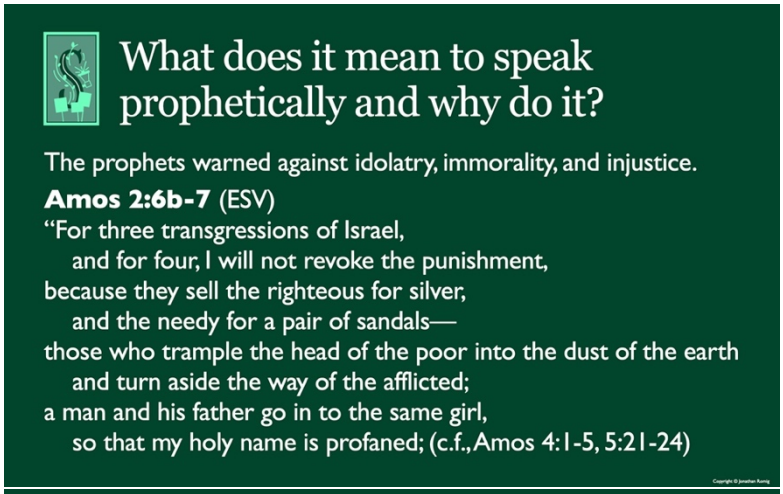
What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
Old Testament: Sometimes "future-telling."
Deuteronomy 18:20, 22 (ESV)
20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' [...] 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Slide 6


What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
Most often "truth-telling."
• See Deuteronomy 28 blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Sinai covenant lawyers).
Deuteronomy 28:15 (ESV)
"But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Slide 7


What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
The prophets warned against idolatry, immorality, and injustice.
Amos 2:6b-7 (ESV)
"For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth
and turn aside the way of the afflicted;
a man and his father go in to the same girl,
so that my holy name is profaned; (c.f., Amos 4:1-5, 5:21-24)
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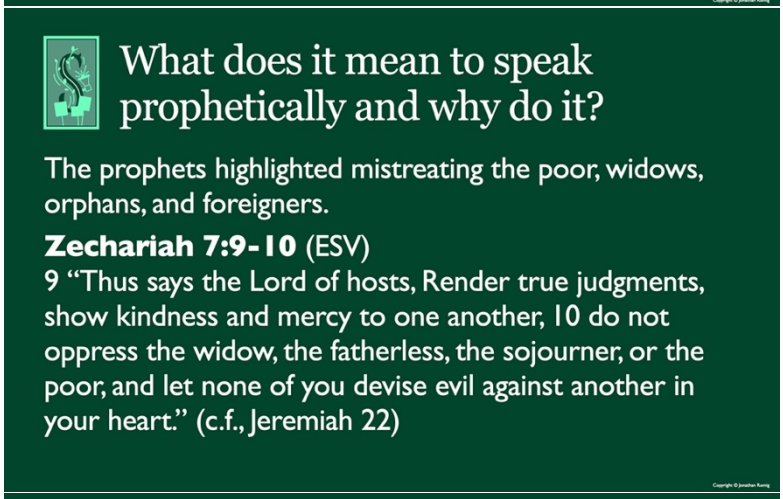
What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
The prophets highlighted mistreating the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners.
Zechariah 7:9-10 (ESV)
9 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." (c.f., Jeremiah 22)
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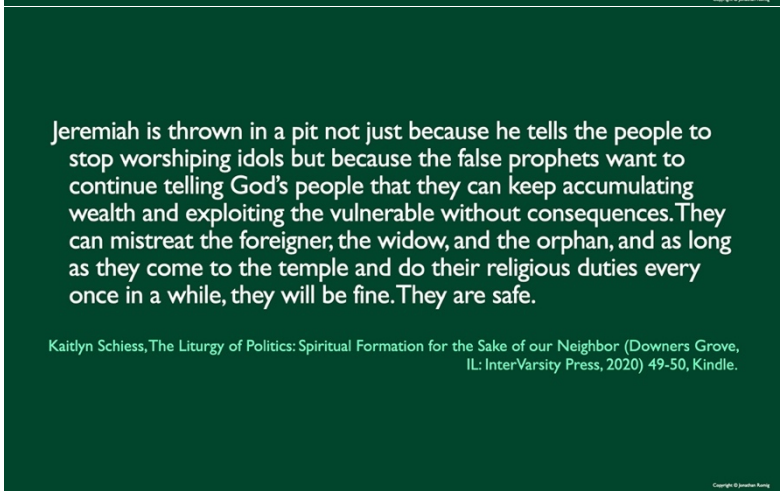
Jeremiah is thrown in a pit not just because he tells the people to stop worshiping idols but because the false prophets want to continue telling God's people that they can keep accumulating wealth and exploiting the vulnerable without consequences. They can mistreat the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, and as long as they come to the temple and do their religious duties every once in a while, they will be fine. They are safe.
Kaitlyn Schiess, The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 49-50, Kindle.
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Slide 10

Those most in jeopardy during Washington's debates and decisions are precisely the people the Bible clearly instructs us to protect and care for—the poorest and most vulnerable. In comparison to the power players of the political system, they have virtually no one lobbying on their behalf in these hugely important discussions about how public resources will be allocated.

Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014) 79, Kindle.

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Slide 11

What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?

New Testament: Ministry/gifting

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (ESV)

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

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What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?

Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (c.f., Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29)

Prophetic preaching should never separate proclamation and practice. Jesus is the perfect expression of what the gospel is and what the gospel does.

Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers. 2018) 120, Kindle.

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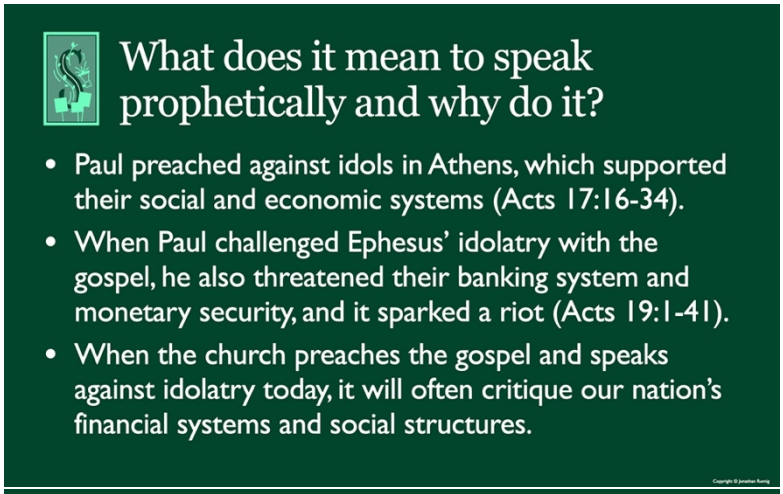
What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
• Paul preached against idols in Athens, which supported their social and economic systems (Acts 17:16-34).
• When Paul challenged Ephesus' idolatry with the gospel, he also threatened their banking system and monetary security, and it sparked a riot (Acts 19:1-41).
• When the church preaches the gospel and speaks against idolatry today, it will often critique our nation's financial systems and social structures.

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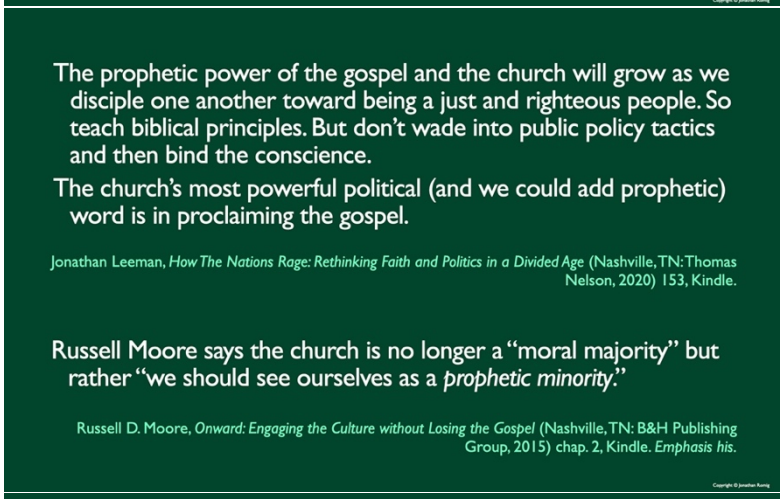
The prophetic power of the gospel and the church will grow as we disciple one another toward being a just and righteous people. So teach biblical principles. But don't wade into public policy tactics and then bind the conscience.
The church's most powerful political (and we could add prophetic) word is in proclaiming the gospel.
Jonathan Leeman, How The Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2020) 153, Kindle.
Russell Moore says the church is no longer a "moral majority" but rather "we should see ourselves as a prophetic minority."
Russell D. Moore, Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 2, Kindle. Emphasis his.

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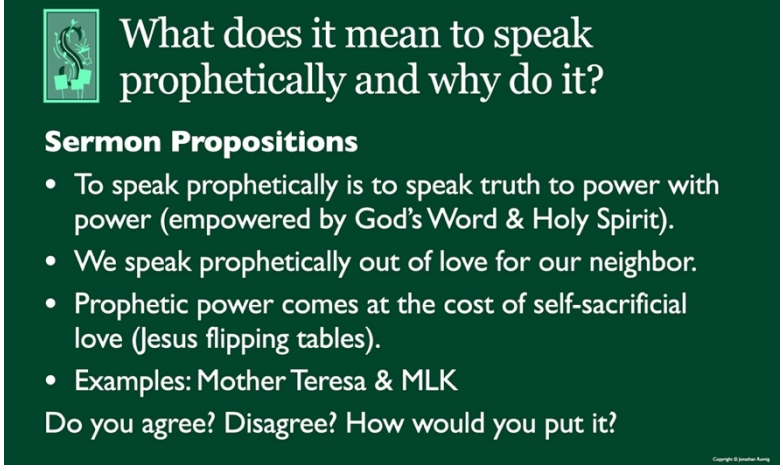
What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
Sermon Propositions
• To speak prophetically is to speak truth to power with power (empowered by God's Word & Holy Spirit).
• We speak prophetically out of love for our neighbor.
• Prophetic power comes at the cost of self-sacrificial love (Jesus flipping tables).
• Examples: Mother Teresa & MLK
Do you agree? Disagree? How would you put it?

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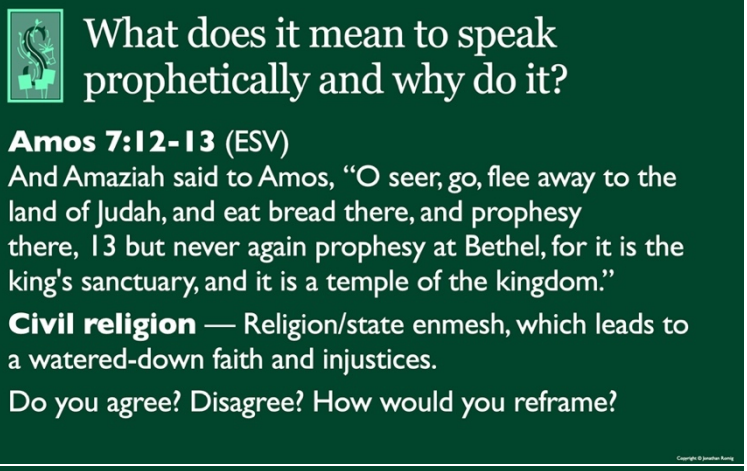
What does it mean to speak prophetically and why do it?
Amos 7:12-13 (ESV)
And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."
Civil religion — Religion/state enmesh, which leads to a watered-down faith and injustices.
Do you agree? Disagree? How would you reframe?

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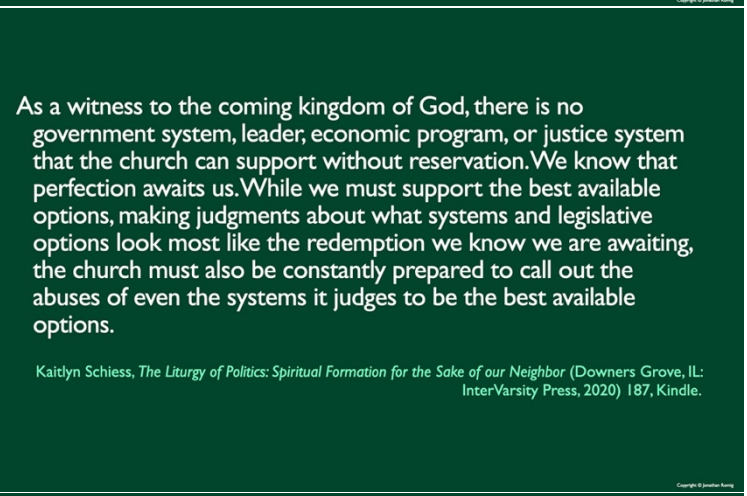
As a witness to the coming kingdom of God, there is no government system, leader, economic program, or justice system that the church can support without reservation. We know that perfection awaits us. While we must support the best available options, making judgments about what systems and legislative options look most like the redemption we know we are awaiting, the church must also be constantly prepared to call out the abuses of even the systems it judges to be the best available options.
Kaitlyn Schiess, The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 187, Kindle.

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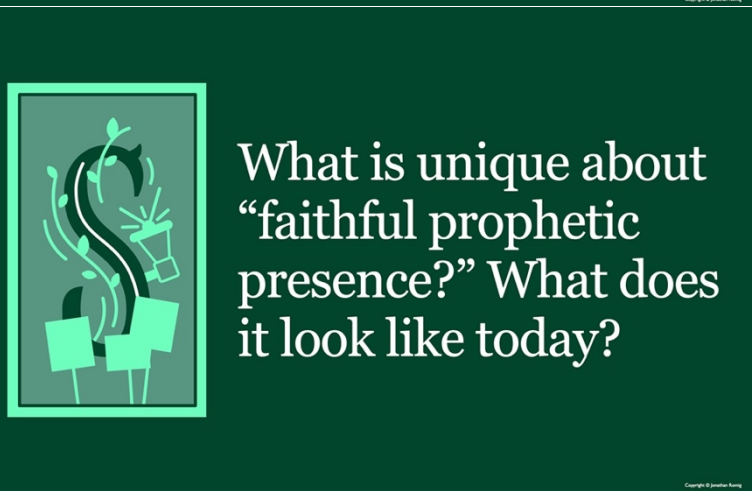

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Faithful prophetic presence will entail some seeking placement within influential institutions in order to slowly subvert those institutions, thus setting the stage for long-term change. We might call these the "court prophets." They seek to be wise compromisers within the current cultural systems and institutions. They are salt in the midst of the world, looking to subtly enhance and improve the culture in Godward directions.

Vermon Pierre, "Faithful Presence Needs Prophets," in Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Faithful Presence Needs [. . .]," Kindle.

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What is unique about "faithful prophetic presence?" What does it look like today?

Potential examples of "court prophets" in the Bible:

- Samuel with King Saul
- Nathan with King David
- Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with King Nebuchadnezzar
- Esther with King Xerxes
- Nehemiah with King Artaxerxes

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The things that actually separate us already have been and remain the big controversies in our culture: What is the proper place for sex in a relationship? What is marriage? When does life begin? These fundamental debates are not easily resolved by a focus on the common good.

Hunter Baker, "Can Christians Change the World after Obergefell?," in Revisiting 'Faithful Presence': To Change the World Five Years Later, ed. Collin Hansen (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2015), chap. "Can Christians Change [. . .]," Kindle.

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What role does wisdom and the Holy Spirit play in speaking prophetically?

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What role does wisdom and the Holy Spirit play in speaking prophetically?

Proverbs 23:23 (ESV)
Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

If we are to regain our prophetic voice, we must have a solid foundation of biblical knowledge and be open to the Spirit's leading in how to apply the balm of God's Word to the issues of our day.

Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers. 2018) 122-123, Kindle.

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Prophetic preaching is the bridge between the solid doctrine of conservative Christianity and the Christian ethics of the liberal perspective. Without it, we can easily remain in our own camp, content to cast aspersions and judgments on those on the other side. We desperately need those voices crying in the wilderness making way for His kingdom purposes on earth.

Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers. 2018) 116-117, Kindle.

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What behavior should we model when we speak prophetically?

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What behavior should we model when we speak prophetically?

James 1:19-20 (ESV)
Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

The problem with carnal anger and outrage is that it's one of the easiest sins to commit while convincing oneself that one is being faithful. [. . .] Rage is no sign of authority, prophetic or otherwise.

Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015) chap. 2, Kindle. Emphasis his.

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We need to find a way of combining a civil outlook with a "passionate intensity" about our convictions. The real challenge is to come up with a convicted civility.

Convicted Christians have often entered the public square as prophets. We want to tell people what God expects of them. And that is a legitimate role. God does expect us to represent the divine concern for righteousness and justice in public life. But the priestly role is also crucial. Indeed, it is usually a necessary preparation for exercising the prophetic role. Until people have been sure that we have heard and understood their concerns, they probably will not listen to our prophetic messages.

Richard J. Mouw, Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010) 14, 125-126, Kindle.

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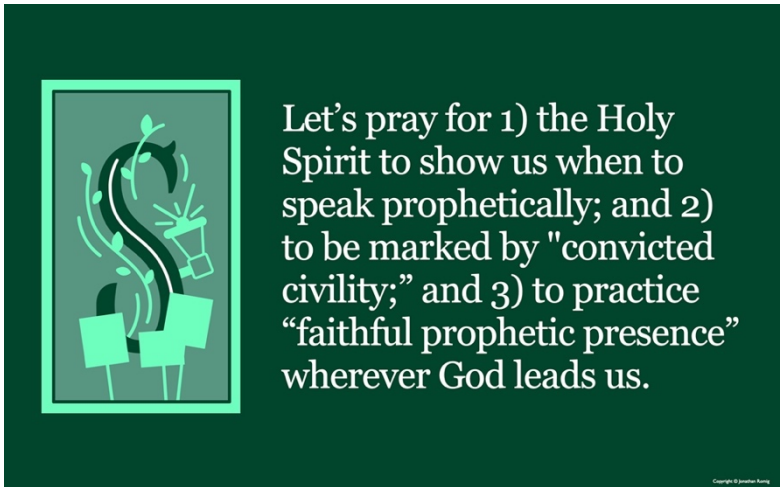

Let's pray for 1) the Holy Spirit to show us when to speak prophetically; and 2) to be marked by "convicted civility;" and 3) to practice "faithful prophetic presence" wherever God leads us.

Zechariah 7:8-12; Matthew 25:31-46

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
Help the Needy

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / November 28th, 2021

(S1) We've been working through the word "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." in our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* sermon series. Today we're finishing our acronym. Let's review: **(S2-9)**

F – Faith, Not Fear (or "faithful presence")

L – Love God & Neighbor (enemies too)

O – Other Peoples' Good (shalom/common good)

U – Understanding & Wisdom

R – Reign of Christ

I – Image of God (*Imago Dei*)

S – Speak Prophetically

H – Help the Needy

Last week we talked about speaking prophetically. We speak prophetically (truth to power with power) out of love for our neighbors, often the poor and needy. There's a Brazilian Catholic archbishop who said:

> **(S10)** "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist." – Hélder Câmara (1909–1999)[1]

One of the prophetic messages the Old Testament prophets emphasized again and again was protecting the poor, needy, and most vulnerable. Israel and Judah's failure to do so is one of the things that sent them into exile. After their exile, God wants them to remember to do justice. The prophet Zechariah returned with the exiles from Babylon.[2]

> **(S11) Zechariah 7:9-10** (ESV)
> "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."

Zechariah speaks prophetically on behalf of widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor—those people most at risk in any society. Zechariah warns the returning exiles not to be like their ancestors who hardened their hearts against these vulnerable people groups, because if they do, they will face God's wrath:

> **(S12) Zechariah 7:12** (ESV)
> They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.

The people faced God's judgment because they oppressed the widows, orphans, immigrants, and poor—the needy. Last week Amos prophesied against six outside nations along with Southern Judah and Northern Israel about their injustices. That theme continues, but now with the return of the Judean exiles.

When I was growing up, I don't remember hearing any Church or Christian emphasize the prophets' warnings to take care of the poor, needy, and most vulnerable in society. I know we cared about abortion, and I remember doing food drives, Christmas shoeboxes, and donating Thanksgiving meals. Our church also hosted an English class for Spanish speakers for a season, but it did not seem like the churches I've known have taught on the poor and needy with the same intensity as the prophets. I don't think that's uncommon in the evangelical church. At least, it hasn't been my experience.

Why is that? Is it because our political ideologies help us see some disadvantaged groups but skip others? Is it because we have Jesus now, so we don't have to worry about the poor and needy? There's a reason our Scripture reading today is first an Old Testament prophet that preaches about the needy and warns of God's wrath. And our second reading is Jesus himself, a prophet who does the exact same thing. Jesus preaches about the needy and warns of God's wrath for those who do not help them.

(S13) Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy.

Like the prophets judged the nations for their level of societal justice, Jesus warns of something similar when he returns. Before it ever gets to the individual, Jesus gathers the "nations" (ethnos). Ethnos can mean "Gentiles" (non-Jews) or nations of people. Jesus gathers all nations and people for the final judgment.

> **(S14) Matthew 25:31-32** (ESV)
> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Sometimes in and around ancient Palestine, the sheep and goats would flock together and mix. Jesus often identifies his people as sheep, and here he begins to separate them out from the mixture of nations.[3] While everything heads towards addressing the church community, it matters that Jesus' judgment starts with the nations. That mirrors the Old Testament prophets like Amos rebuking the nations and reminds us of our corporate (church), political, and even national responsibility to address caring for the poor.

> **(S15) Matthew 25:33-36** (ESV)
> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Jesus uses the imagery of "blessing," I think to recall his audience's mind to the promises God made to Abram (Abraham) and the Israelite people that he was going to bless them and make them a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:1-3). God's true people are going to be a blessing to the world, both spiritually and practically. To be a blessing to the least of these, the neediest, is part of what it means for God's people to bless all the families of the earth. To be a blessing includes providing for:

1. **(S16) Physical Needs – Food, drink, clothing, healthcare.**

Maslov's hierarchy of needs might identify these as those basic physiological and safety needs. We need to provide baseline care for the least of these—food, water, clothing, healthcare for the sick.[4] Even before political action, Jesus encourages the hands-on meeting of the needs of others.

2. **(S17) Social & Safety Needs – The outsider, stranger, foreigner, and immigrant.**

Jesus' word for "stranger" here is the Greek word "xenos." In the New Testament, xenos can mean stranger, alien, or foreigner.[5] So when Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," he emphasizes taking care of people foreign to the community. Today this could be immigrants, refugees, or maybe at a basic level, those outside our church and circle of relationships. Jesus calls us to be mindful of them too.

3. **(S18) Restoration & Justice Needs – Those imprisoned, forgotten, and neglected.**

Jesus encourages his followers to visit those in prison. That scares me because I've never even been to prison (a prison). I remember once my high-school youth group visited a boy's home for Christmas. I didn't realize how important that was till much later. I'm glad Cornerstone supports prison ministry, but maybe we can do more. How should this impact how we think about our criminal justice system? Do we lock people made in the image of God up and throw away the key? Jesus shows compassion to people like them. I also think there's a principle of caring for anyone society forgets, the elderly and homebound.

President Jimmy Carter has tried to care for the poor and needy, both in and outside of office::

> Shortly after presidential candidate Jimmy Carter gave his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, he taught a Sunday-school class at his home church. A reporter was there to write a story about what he said to the class. In class, Carter went through his speech point by point. In the speech he had expressed a concern for the poor—the reason for this, Carter explained to the class, is that the Bible says God is concerned for the oppressed and the outcast.[6]

(S19) Jimmy Carter continues to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, reaching 35 builds in 2018.[7] He might be the reason *Habitat for Humanity* is so well known.[8] When he finishes a house, he gives the homeowners their keys and a Bible. *Jesus will judge nations on how well they care for the needy*. Jesus calls us to care for the needy, but more than that, Jesus identifies with the needy.

(S20) Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.

Jesus identifies himself with his Father, the Jewish people, his disciples, and the poor, needy, and most vulnerable. The sheep are surprised when Jesus identifies himself with the poor and vulnerable.

> **(S21) Matthew 25:37-40** (ESV)
> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

To serve the poor is to serve Jesus. There's some debate of what Jesus means when he says, "the least of these my brothers." Does he only mean caring for the poor and needy within his followers, the Christian community, or all poor people? Brothers could mean either.[9] When we served at Living Waters in Lowell, several of those I talked to expressed faith in Christ or openness to hear the gospel. These are our brothers. The point of the sheep and the goats is not to figure out which needy people we don't need to serve but to serve the needy. That's just like the story of the Good Samaritan. The wrong question is, "Who is my neighbor?" The right question is, "How can I most love my neighbor?" It helps to look at Paul, who, like Jesus, seemed to emphasize the faith community but also called his followers to take care of any in need.

> **(S22) Galatians 6:10** (ESV)
> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Let's make sure we take care of our church family, which I see here at Cornerstone. We have a benevolence fund to help pay for utilities, medical, mental health, and other needs, and I often see our church family making meals, visiting each other, giving rides, and just being there in times of need. Our family felt it when my dad got sick with Covid, and I had to leave town. We received meals, a mowed lawn, and a car ride to the airport. The body of Christ came together for us. And we have such a good thing; lets' share it with an outside world. Let's do acts of kindness and mercy for community members who don't know Christ yet. They may be our future brothers and sisters in Christ or are already a part of another church community.

Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy multiple times:

> **(S23) Matthew 25:41-46** (ESV)
> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' **(S24)**
> 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

To ignore the physically and spiritually poor and needy is to ignore Jesus. Jesus doesn't say, "the least of these my brothers" in this passage, but simply "the least of these." Jesus casts the net wide. To care for the least of these is to care for the greatest of all, the King of Kings. If we take a moment and look at Jesus' life, we see Jesus isn't making this up. **Jesus was…**

> **(S25) Hungry** – At the start of Jesus' ministry, he fasted from food for 40 days. He knew what it was like to be near starvation. Satan wouldn't tempt him with bread if it weren't a real temptation (Matthew 4:1-4). Jesus became hungry so that he could feed us with his own body in communion.
>
> **(S26) Thirsty** – On the cross, Jesus said, "I thirst," before giving up his spirit (John 19:28-30). He became thirsty so that we could drink his living water and never thirst again (John 4:14).
>
> **(S27) Stranger** – When Herod tried to kill Jesus, Joseph and Mary fled into the night as refugees to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). Jesus went into exile so he could bring us, exiles, home. Jesus left his glory in heaven so that we could enter into glory with him (John 17:5; 1 Corinthians 15:42-43).
>
> **(S28) Naked** – Jesus was stripped of his garments and was probably even naked at the crucifixion. He was unclothed and shamed so that he might clothe us in his righteousness (Zechariah 3:3-5).
>
> **(S29) Sick** – They flogged and abused Jesus so that he could bear the sin of the whole world upon himself. Isaiah 53:5 says he "was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his wounds we are healed."
>
> **(S30) Imprisoned** – They arrested, tried, and crucified Jesus, an innocent victim, but set guilty Barabbas free. This is the gospel—that God condemns sinless Jesus to pardon and forgive us.

When Jesus identifies himself with the needy, he's not just saying it because it's a nice thing to say, but because he lived it. And how we treat people like Jesus reflects how we treat him. Like in Zechariah, those who ignore the poor and needy, and so mistreat Jesus, will face God's wrath. *Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy. Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.*

Here's my problem with some liberal politics and theology. When they read Matthew 25, they downplay God's judgment and hellfire and so neuter our motivation to do good. On the other side, I get frustrated with some conservative politics and theology. When they read Matthew 25, they downplay that Jesus meant what he said because we're saved by grace. They also neuter the fire in Jesus' words. The best understanding holds the two in tension. God is gracious, but he's also serious about us caring for the needy. And it's this grace that both challenges and motivates us from the inside out to do good.

(S31) Jesus' grace moves us to help the needy.

I want to point out one more thing from our passage. Those who have helped Jesus, the sheep, didn't realize they'd helped him. They didn't remember caring for the needy and were surprised.

(S32) Matthew 25:37, 40 (ESV)
Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? […] 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

And if we were to reread the second half, we'd see that the goats are just as surprised that they haven't served Jesus or cared for the needy. If we read this passage by itself, we might be tempted to think works save us. But Jesus emphasizes grace as he warns of judgment.[10]

If, when we get to heaven, we present a list of all the needy people we've served, will we have been serving Jesus or ourselves? But suppose we recognize that we've done nothing deserving of eternal life even on our best day of caring for the poor and needy. In that case, we'll be overjoyed when Jesus accepts our imperfect offerings as done unto him (1 Corinthians 10:31). His grace allows us to serve the needy and care for the poor, not to win salvation, but out of gratitude and joy for what Jesus has done for us. Grace changes our heart's motivations to want to love others as Jesus has loved us.

So how does this connect to politics and voting? When you are thinking about a ballot issue or the candidates, remember the poor and needy. Try to seek their best. Only God will know if we vote to protect ourselves or out of a sense of social self-righteousness. Only God will know our motives, and if we care about those we impact with our ballot. I believe that even if we vote the "wrong way," God can still be honored if we attempt to do so out of genuine love for our neighbors, especially the poor and needy.

When it comes to the poor and needy, there's no quick fix. Good policies require a lot of understanding and wisdom. I think we can all agree that we should care for the poor and needy, but we might differ on how to do that—more jobs, a better social safety net, some other way to help? It's challenging to help, and not hurt, to not act like a savior, but to equip and empower. Only grace can sustain us for the long haul of helping those in need. *Jesus' grace moves us to help the needy*.

(S33) Let's be Matthew 25 Christians who help the needy.

Matthew 25 is the cumulation of what it means to walk in faith, not fear, practice faithful presence where we live, honor the image of God in all people, seek the shalom and the common good of our city, and honor the prophets' call to care for the poor and needy. And it takes wisdom and the Holy Spirit to do so well.

As part of my studies, I read the testimony of one self-described liberal evangelical, Jim Wallis. He grew up in a church in Detroit, but when he grew concerned for the poor in the city, especially marginalized black people, his church wouldn't do anything about it.[11] That's when he emotionally checked out of the church. After that, he searched through activists and revolutionaries to find the answers he was looking for, but they all lacked a "spiritual foundation" for caring for the poor and fell short.[12] But what brought Wallis back to faith in Jesus was not a church or evangelism. He was incredibly moved by Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7, but it was reading Jesus' words in Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats, which brought him home to Jesus.[13] When he saw Jesus' heart for the poor and needy, he fell in love again. That was the kind of Savior he wanted to follow, and a Matthew 25 Christian was the

kind of disciple he wanted to be. *I want to be a Matthew 25 Christian who helps the needy* in hands-on ministry and political engagement. *I hope you do too*. Let's pray.

> *Benediction* – **Jude 24-25** (NIV)
> To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my ninth sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *Help the Needy*. Here are several follow-up spiritual exercises for continuing to learn and grow this week:

Journal & Pray: Who are the poor and needy in your community, both your church and your town? Do you know who they are? Can you identify orphans, widows, immigrants, and the poor? Write a list people in need. Then next to that list, write how you could help, your church might be able to help, and your local government could help. Pray over this list and ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern which ideas are worth following up on and which ones to ignore. Listen to where the Holy Spirit leads.

Listen (sermon #1): In the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, Jesus encourages his followers to care for the poor and needy. He also warns his followers what will happen if they don't. Probably one of the most qualified pastors to preach this text today is Francis Chan. Listen to his sermon on YouTube: "The Sheep and the Goats Matthew 25 Francis Chan" (2/22/2018; 28:49).

Listen (sermon #2): This is my last Timothy Keller recommendation (maybe). He preaches the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and talks about how important it is for the church to care for the needy. YouTube: "Blueprint for Revival: Social Concern – Timothy Keller [Sermon]" (8/10/2015; 40:05)

Listen (sermon #3): It's probably self-promotional to share one of my sermons, but when I reread it this week, I felt like this sermon is a helpful bridge between last week's message from Amos, *Speak Prophetically*, and this week's message on caring for the poor and needy. If you'd like, please read or re-listen to "Homeless Lazarus | Luke 16:19-31." The scripture reading starts at about 31:35 into the video.[14]

Read (book): Dr. Kenneth Barnes co-led my GCTS Ockenga cohort, and as part of our weekend discussing business, we read and discussed his book *Redeeming Capitalism* (224 pages; intermediate level). I'd never read an in-depth critique of capitalism, socialism, communism, and economic systems before, and I found his insights and proposed solutions helpful and biblical. If you're interested, I recommend reading this TGC book review and listening to him discuss his book on the Eric Metaxas show. You'll notice a lot of overlapping themes with our sermon series, especially in the 2018 interview (#1 July 25, 2018; Hour 2; #2 March 29, 2019; Hour 2). The interviews begin after commercials and news.[15]

Worship: Listen and sing along as Chris Tomlin leads "God of This City." Pray it for your city, for Westford, and Boston. Pray the Lord would provide for the needy wherever they are and that he would use our church to care for the most vulnerable in our communities. Thank you for praying.

God bless,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

1. Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 6, Kindle.

2. "Overview: Zechariah," BibleProject, published August 1, 2016, accessed November 24, 2021 https://youtu.be/_106IfO6Kc0.

3. Psalm 23; Matthew 18:12; John 10:27-29.

4. Dr. Saul McLeod, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," SimplyPsychology, updated December 29, 2020, accessed November 27, 2021 https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html.

5. Matthew 25:35, 38, 43; 27:7; Acts 17:18, 21; Romans 16:23; Ephesians 2:12, 19; Hebrews 11:13, 19; 1 Peter 4:12; 3 John 5.

6. Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010) 131, Kindle.

7. See "Carter Work Project 2018," Habitat for Humanity, accessed November 27, 2021 https://www.habitat.org/volunteer/build-events/carter-work-project/2018.

8. "35 years of building with the Carters," Habitat for Humanity, published May 30, 2018, accessed November 27, 2021 https://youtu.be/5IKJ_2JGK24.

9. Matthew 10:21; 12:48; 18:15; 19:29.

10. See David J. Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) chap. 5, Kindle.

11. Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014) 56-57, Kindle. Wallis highlights the importance of "nations" in Matthew 25 on page 70.

12. Wallis, *The (Un)Common* Good, 67-68, Kindle. Matthew 5-7 also impacted him. Originally "spiritual foundations."

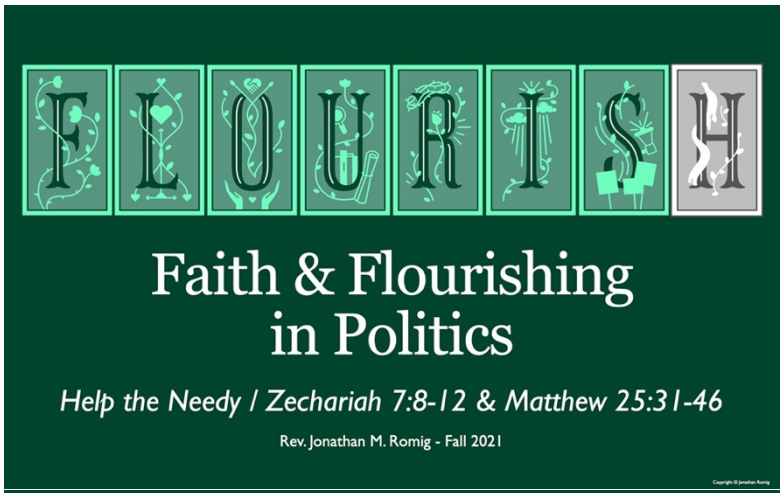
13. Wallis, *The (Un)Common* Good, 69, Kindle. Matthew 5-7 also impacted him.

14. Jonathan Romig, "Homeless Lazarus | Luke 16:19-31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus," Cornerstone Congregational Church, April 11, 2021 https://cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/homeless-lazarus-luke-1619-31-the-rich-man-and-lazarus/.

15. These recommendations do not constitute an endorsement of the Eric Metaxas show.

#9 Sermon Slides

Slide 1



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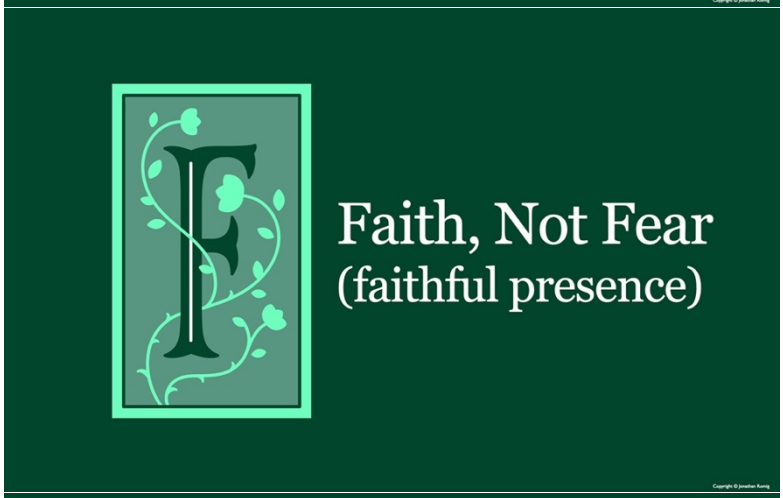

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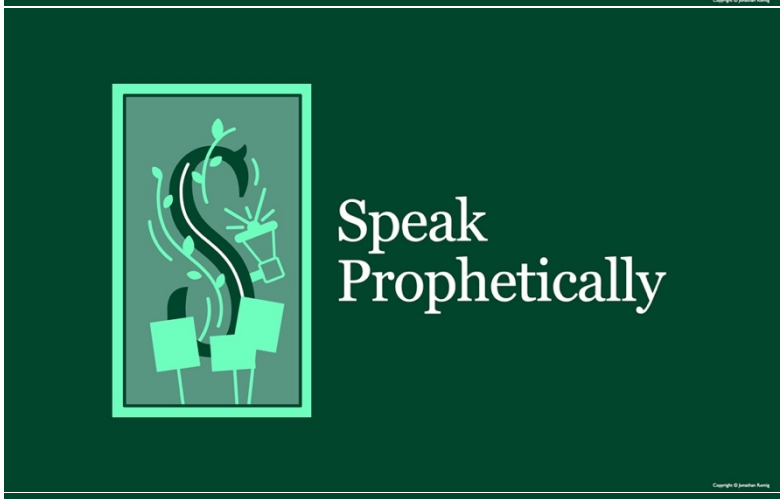

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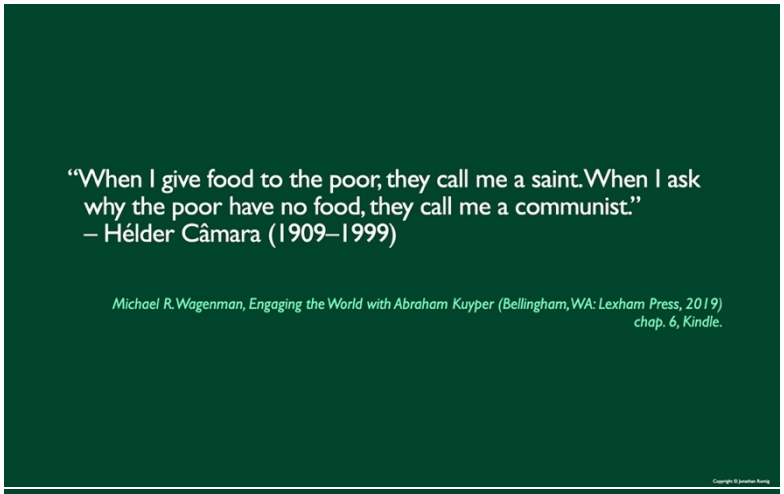
"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist."
– Hélder Câmara (1909–1999)
Michael R. Wagenman, Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 6, Kindle.
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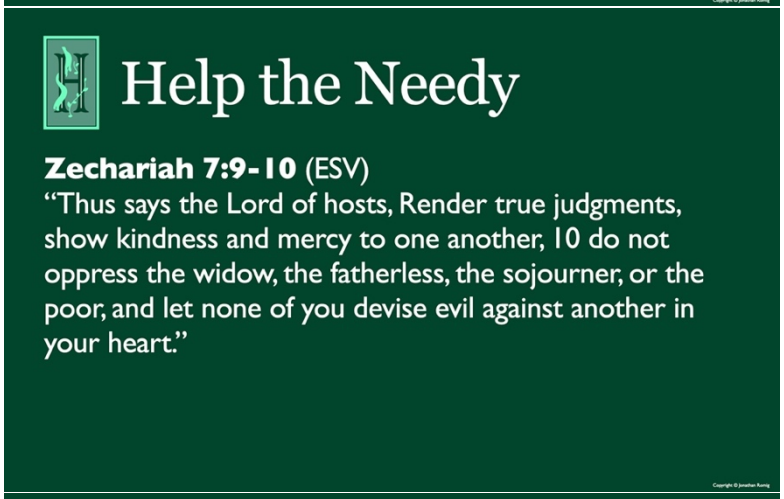
Help the Needy
Zechariah 7:9-10 (ESV)
"Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."
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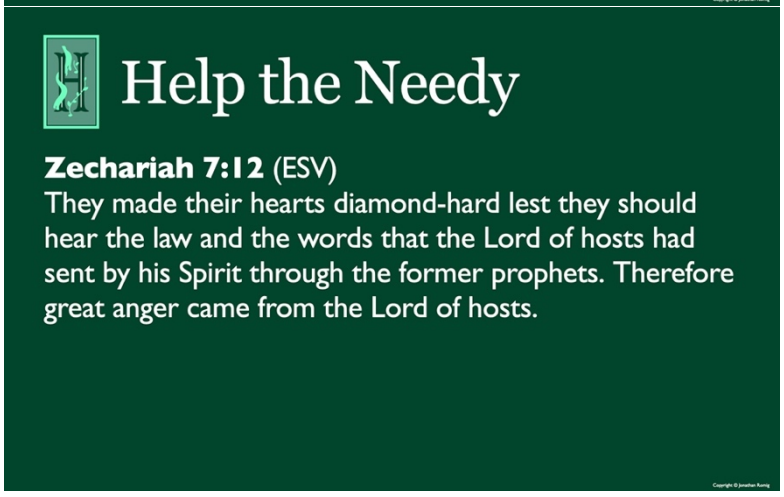
Help the Needy
Zechariah 7:12 (ESV)
They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.
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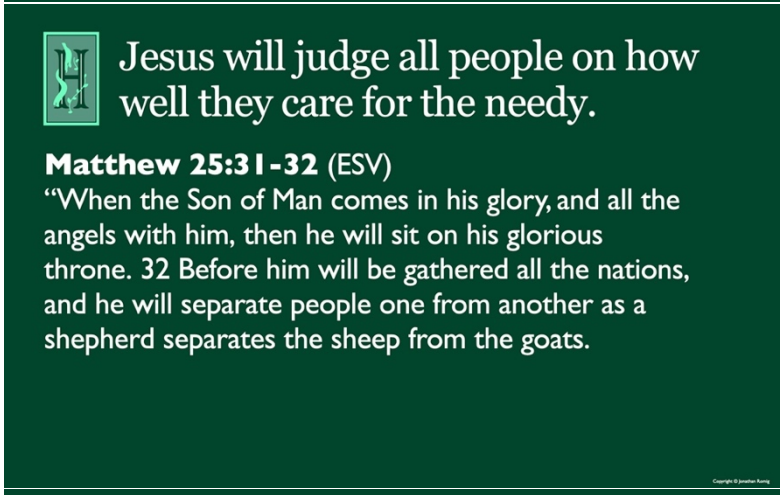
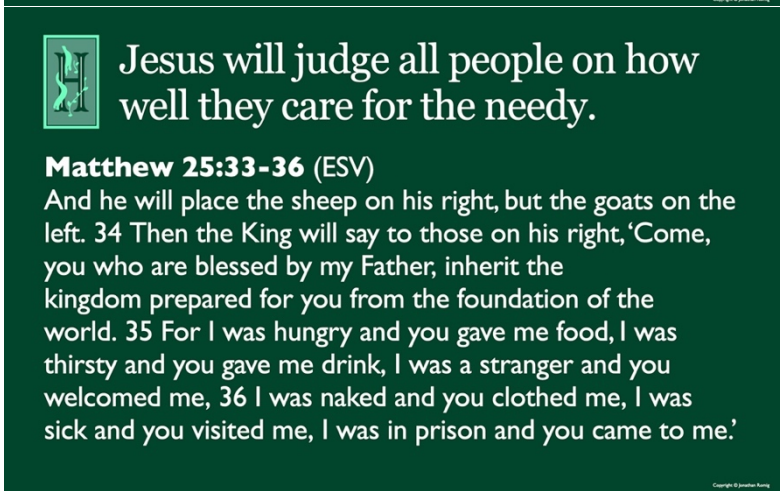
Slide 13

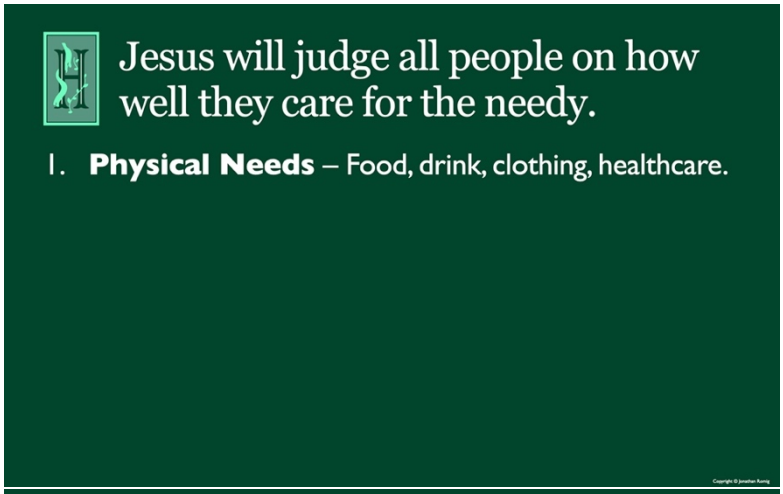
Slide 14


Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy.
Matthew 25:31-32 (ESV)
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Slide 15


Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy.
Matthew 25:33-36 (ESV)
And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

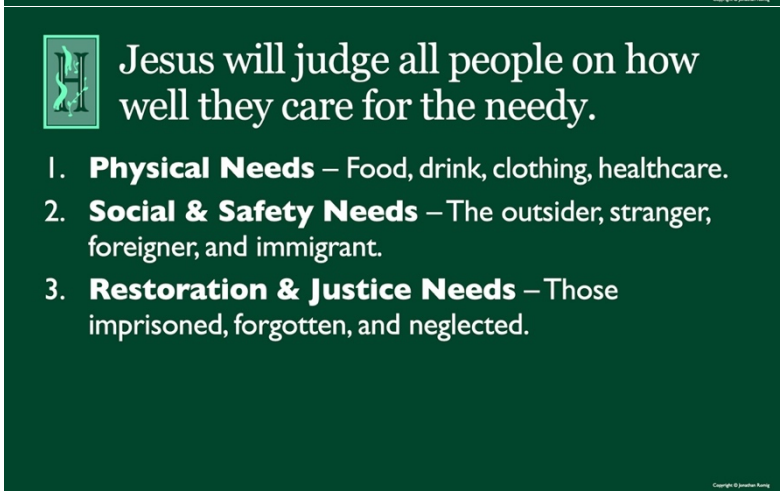
Slide 16



Slide 17

Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy.
1. **Physical Needs** – Food, drink, clothing, healthcare.
2. **Social & Safety Needs** – The outsider, stranger, foreigner, and immigrant.

Slide 18


Jesus will judge all people on how well they care for the needy.
1. **Physical Needs** – Food, drink, clothing, healthcare.
2. **Social & Safety Needs** – The outsider, stranger, foreigner, and immigrant.
3. **Restoration & Justice Needs** – Those imprisoned, forgotten, and neglected.

Slide 19

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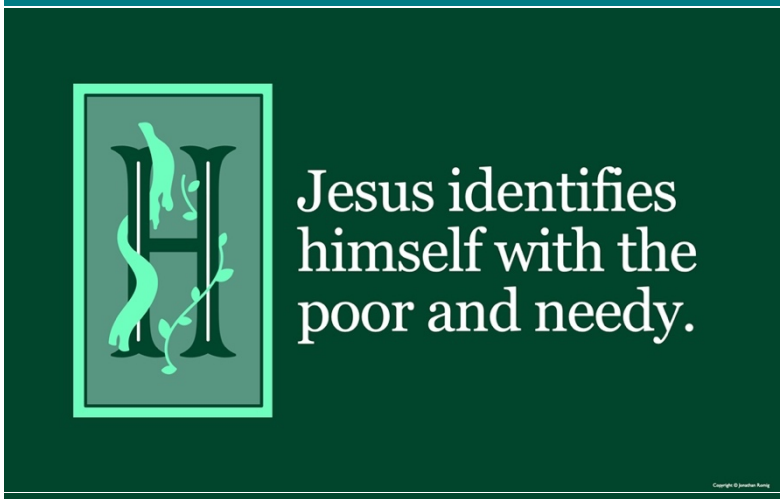

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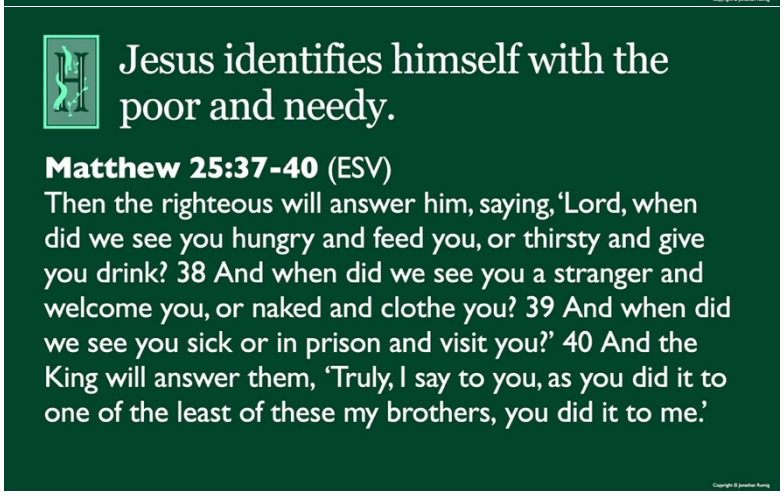
Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.
Matthew 25:37-40 (ESV)
Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

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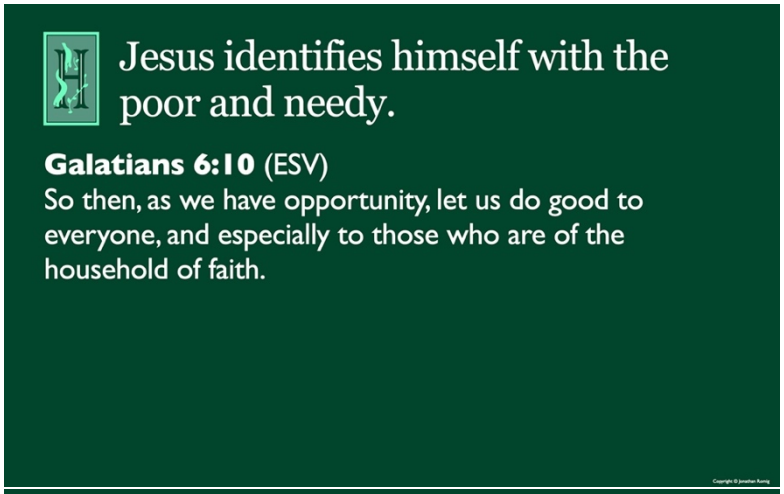
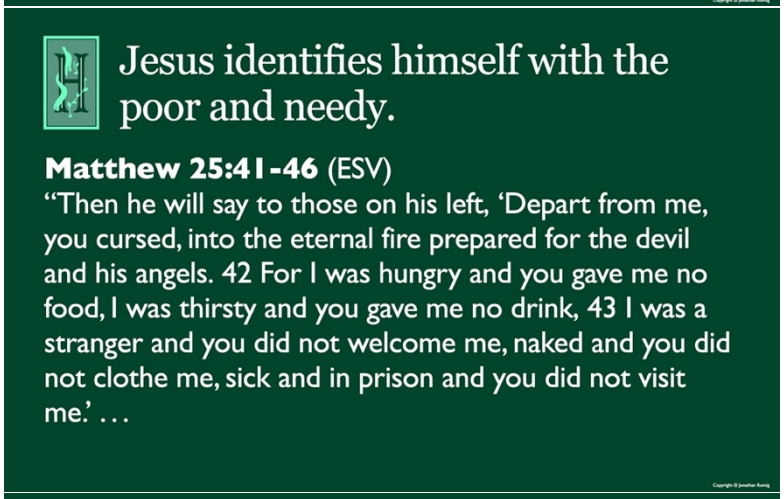

Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.
Galatians 6:10 (ESV)
So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Slide 23


Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.
Matthew 25:41-46 (ESV)
"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' . . .

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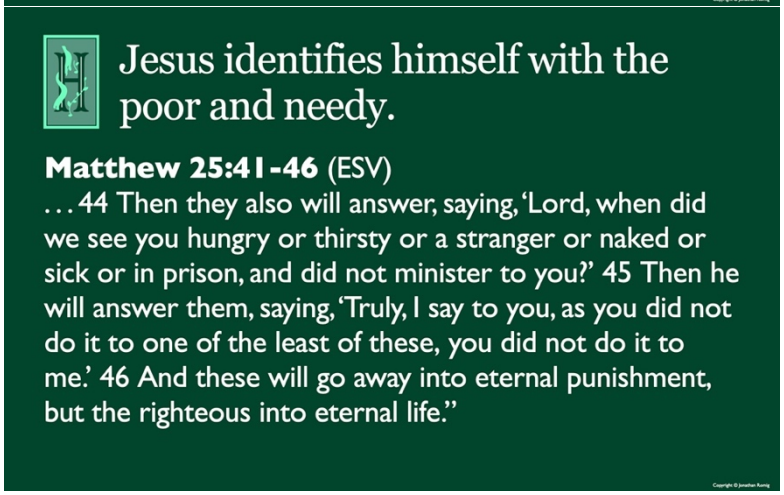
Jesus identifies himself with the poor and needy.
Matthew 25:41-46 (ESV)
. . . 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

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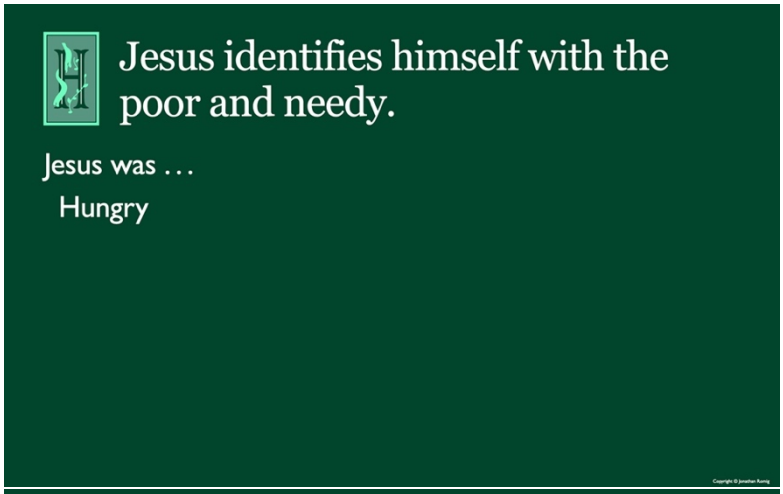

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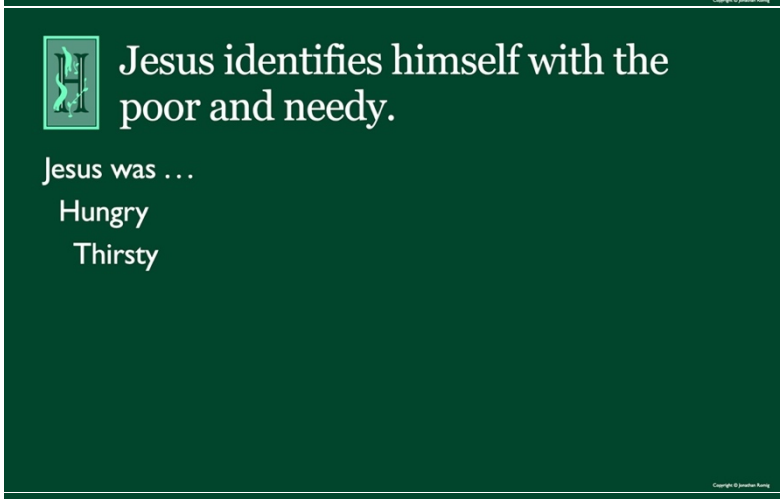

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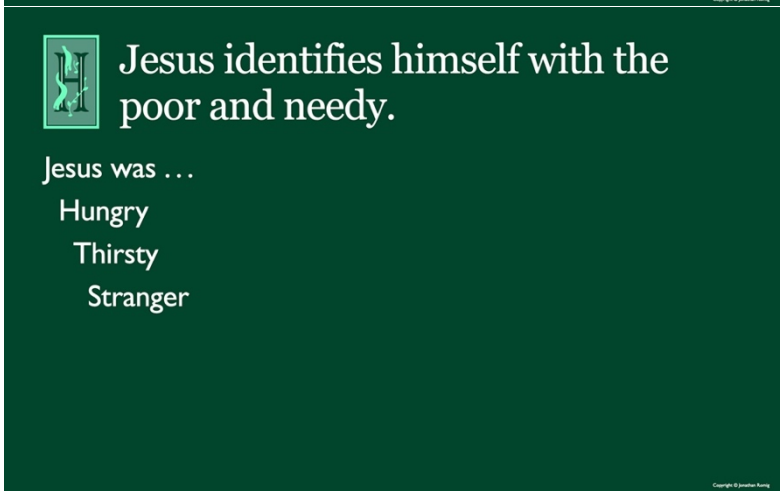

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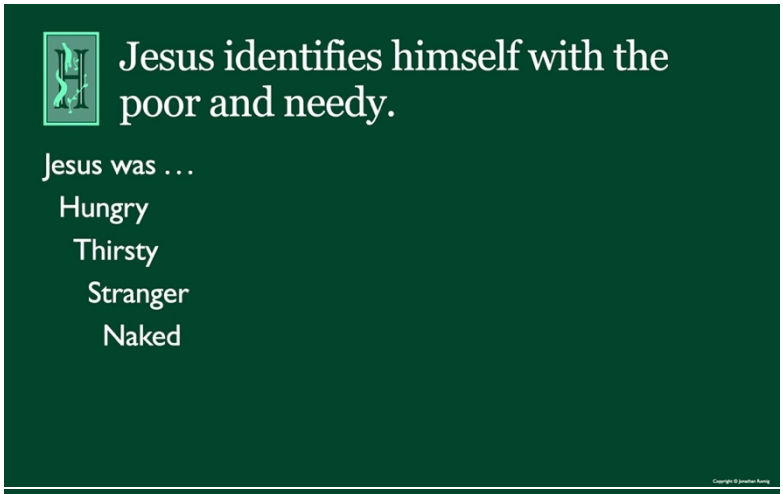

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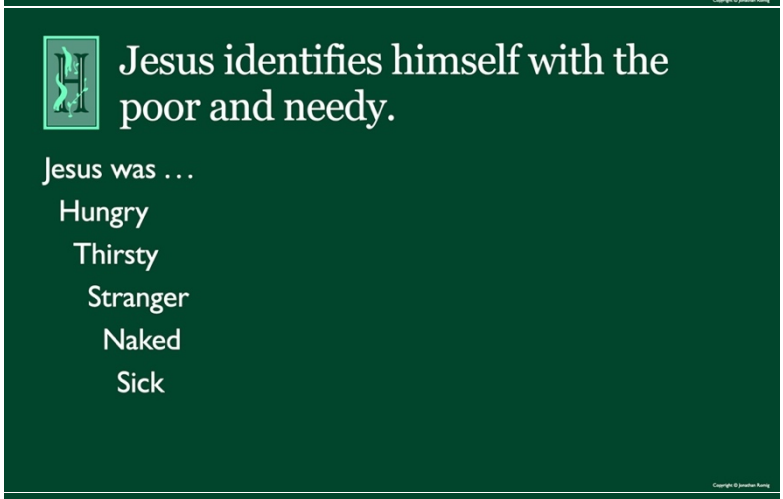

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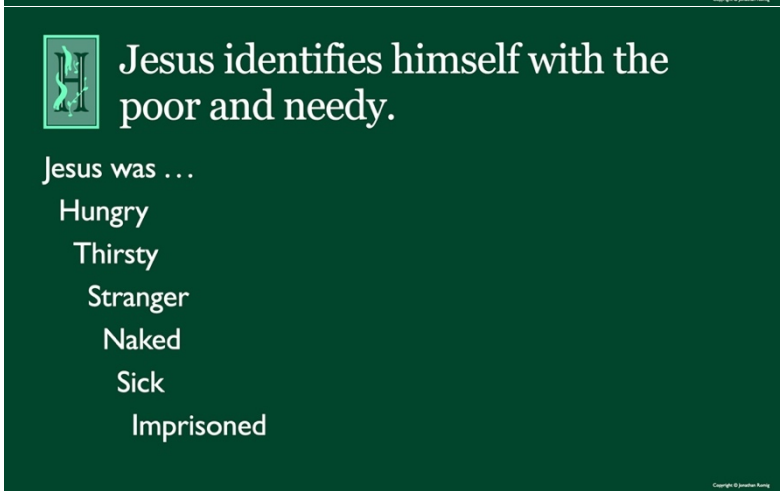

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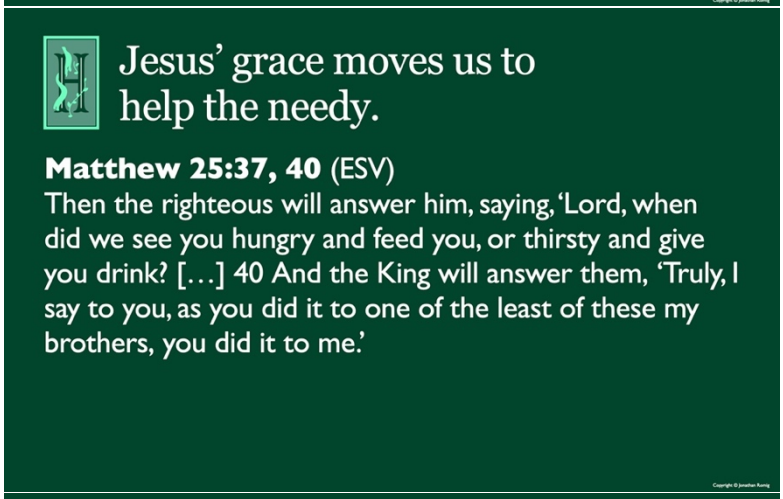
Jesus' grace moves us to help the needy.
Matthew 25:37, 40 (ESV)
Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? […] 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Slide 33

#9 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1

Slide 2

Our Garden Hedge:
1. Listen Well - We don't have all the answers so let's ask what others think, really try to hear each other out, and let others finish their thoughts.
2. Speak with Brevity & Focus - Let's leave space for others to participate and stay on track ("Keep to our hedge").
3. Practice Gentle Courage - Let's be bold and share our thoughts and ideas, point to what we believe the Scripture and wisdom says, and yet do so with a gentle and humble spirit.
4. Keep Praying - Let's pray for the Holy Spirit to be present and to bear fruit through our discussion.

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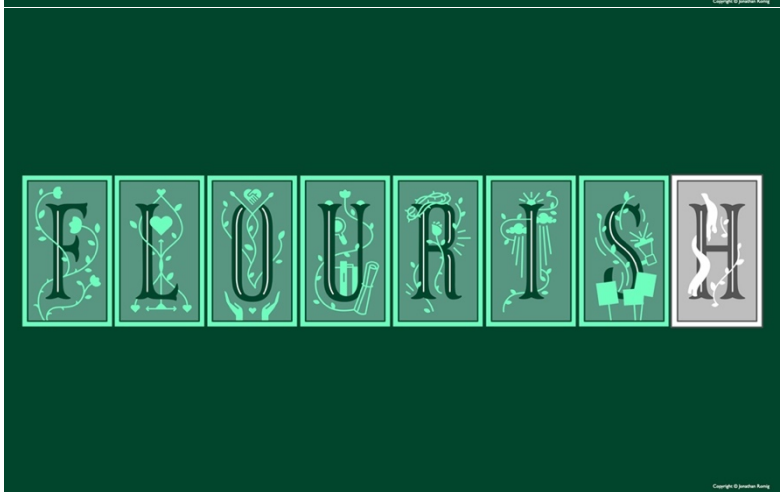

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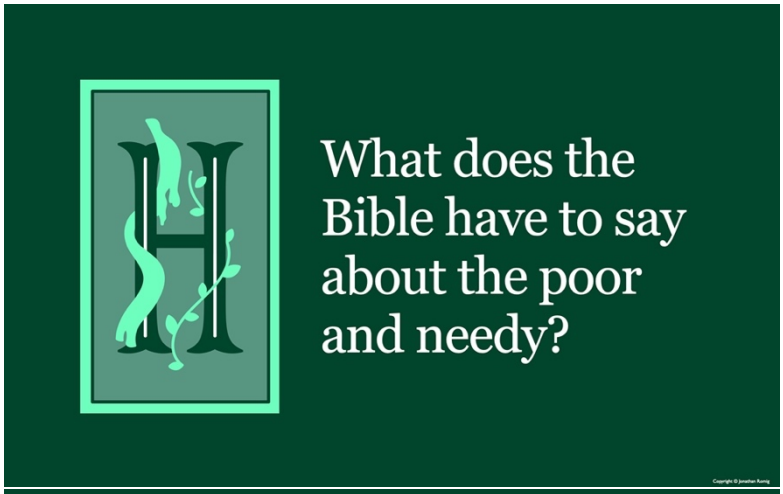

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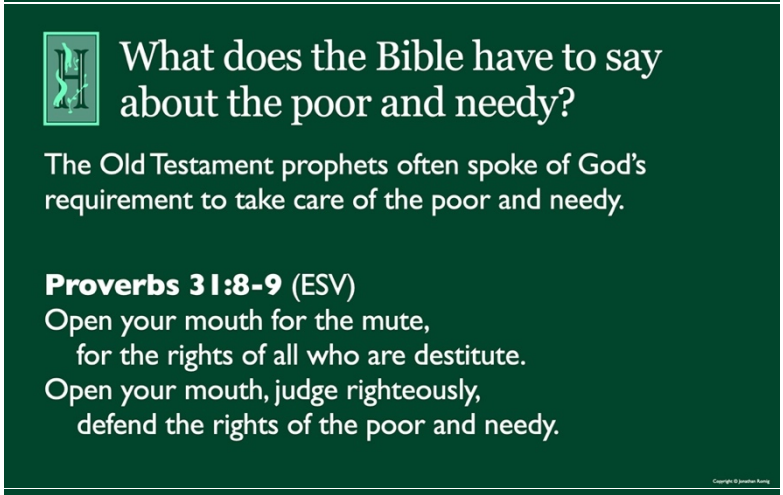
What does the Bible have to say about the poor and needy?
The Old Testament prophets often spoke of God's requirement to take care of the poor and needy.
Proverbs 31:8-9 (ESV)
Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Slide 6

Isaiah 58:6-8 (ESV)
6 "Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

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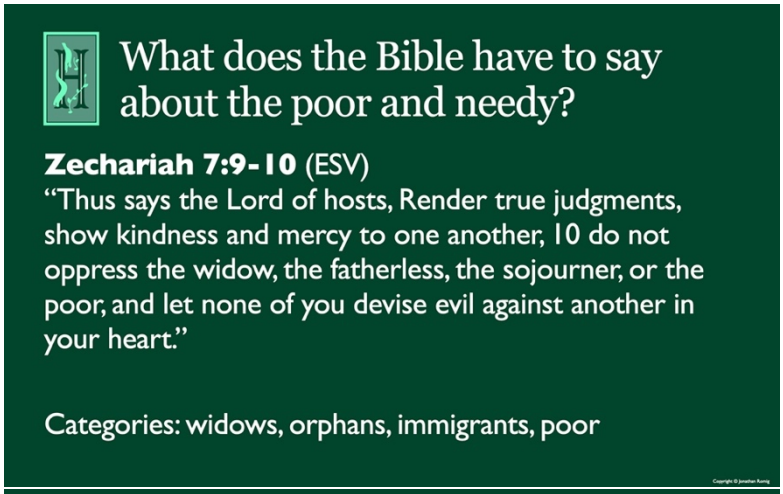
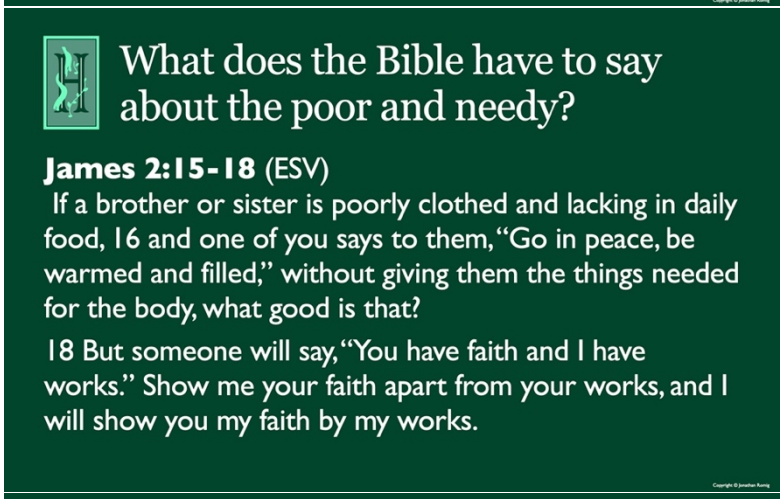
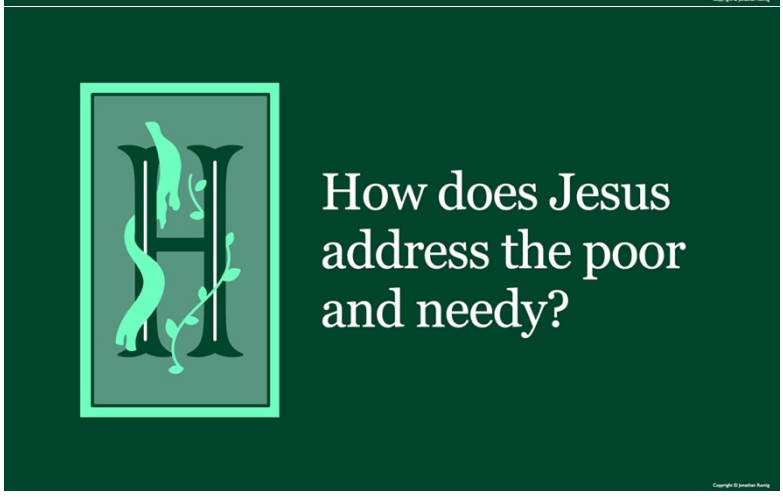

What does the Bible have to say about the poor and needy?
Zechariah 7:9-10 (ESV)
"Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."
Categories: widows, orphans, immigrants, poor

Slide 8


What does the Bible have to say about the poor and needy?
James 2:15-18 (ESV)
If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?
18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Slide 9



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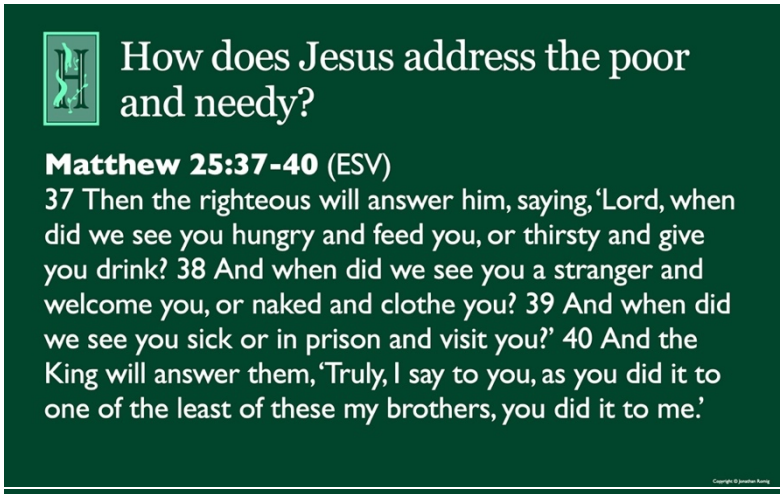
How does Jesus address the poor and needy?
Matthew 25:37-40 (ESV)
37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

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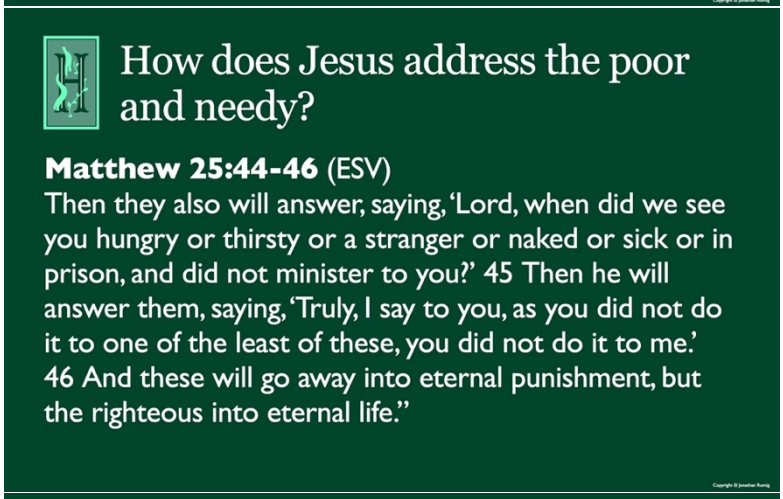
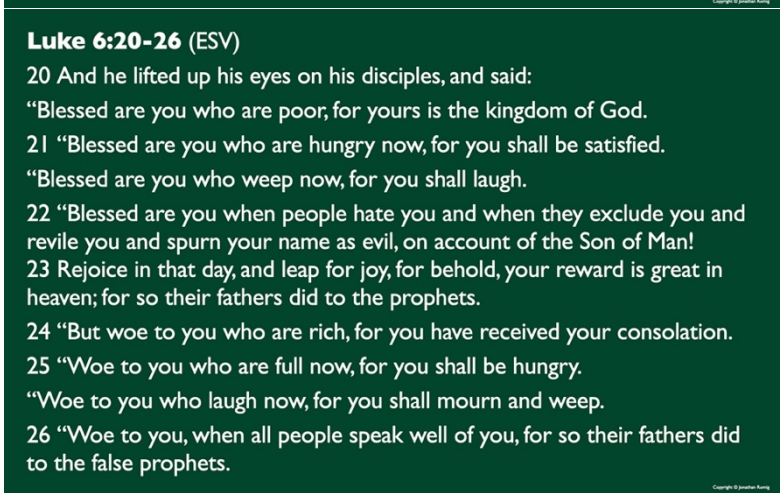

How does Jesus address the poor and needy?
Matthew 25:44-46 (ESV)
Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Slide 12


Luke 6:20-26 (ESV)
20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.
"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.
22 "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!
23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.
24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
25 "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.
"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.
26 "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Slide 13

From Luke's Sermon on the Plain, we can make some initial conclusions about the politics of Jesus. He was an advocate for the poor and the hungry. He cared for those who were sad and shared in their plight. He stood firm with those who were persecuted for being his followers. He was wary of systems that favored the rich while taking advantage of the poor. He challenged his followers to love their enemies, pray for their persecutors, turn the other cheek, and treat others the way they would want to be treated. He opened up the possibility that God's Kingdom will look nothing like the kingdoms of this world.

Clay Stauffer, *Preaching Politics: Proclaiming Jesus in an Age of Money, Power, and Partisanship* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press. 2016) chap. 2, Kindle.

What do you think? Agree? Disagree? Too provocative?

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What level of responsibility does the church have to the poor and needy?

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Slide 15

What level of responsibility does the church have to the poor and needy?

2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)
For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

Matthew 19:24 (ESV)
Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

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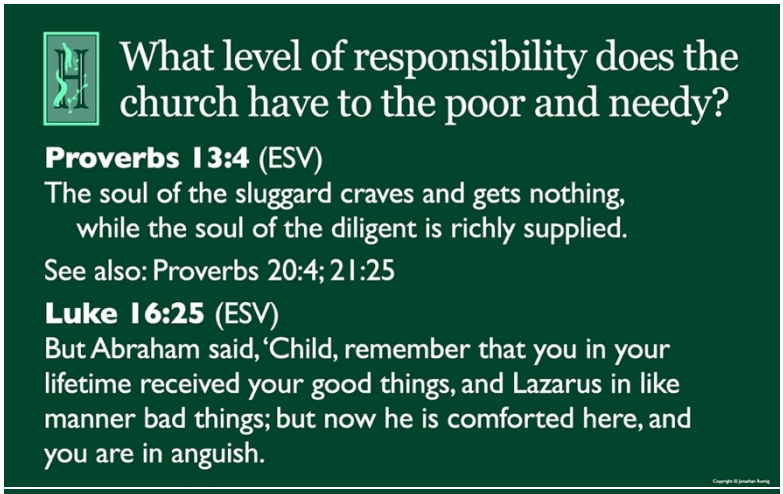
What level of responsibility does the church have to the poor and needy?
Proverbs 13:4 (ESV)
The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.
See also: Proverbs 20:4; 21:25
Luke 16:25 (ESV)
But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

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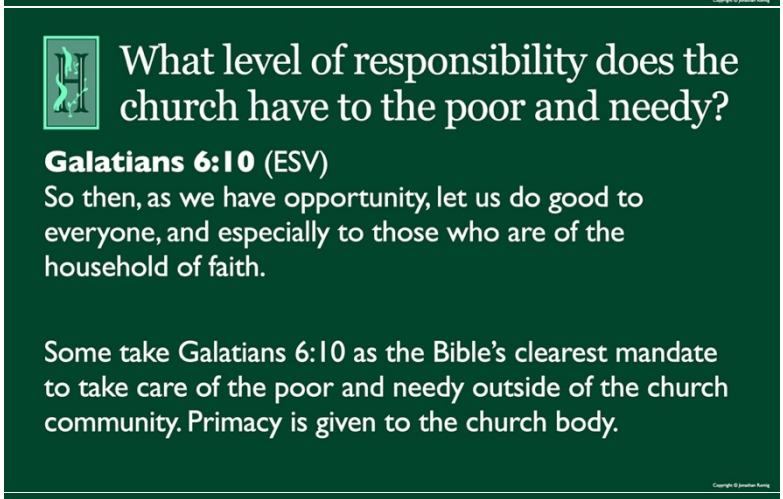
What level of responsibility does the church have to the poor and needy?
Galatians 6:10 (ESV)
So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.
Some take Galatians 6:10 as the Bible's clearest mandate to take care of the poor and needy outside of the church community. Primacy is given to the church body.

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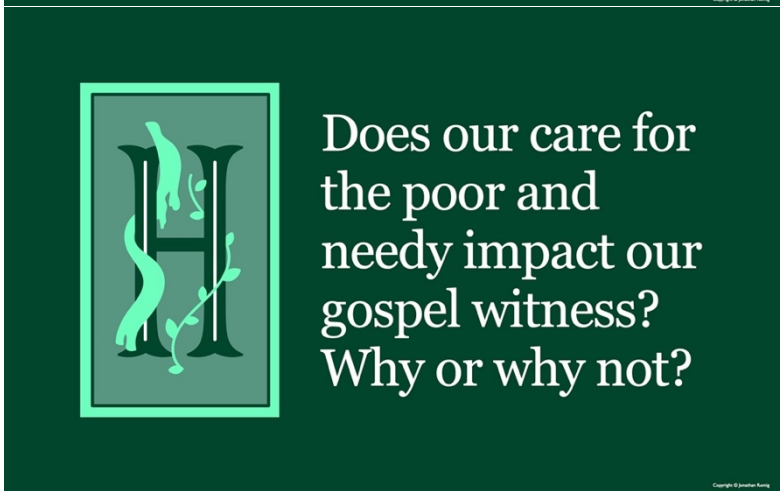

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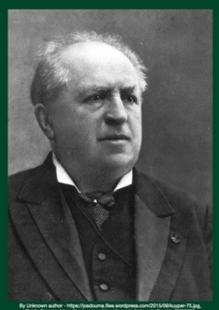

By Unknown author - https://pedsumc.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/kuyper-71.jpg, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43503051

Christians are called to take sides in socio-economic problems. They are called to take the side of the poor, the unemployed or underemployed, and those working in degrading conditions and advocate for better laws and policies. Otherwise, Kuyper warns, non-Christians will hear Christian talk about love but see it strikingly missing from their public and social actions.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 6, Kindle.

What do you think? Agree? Disagree? Something else?

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Caring for the poor and the weak became, ironically, a major reason for the cultural influence the church eventually came to wield. If the church does not identify with the marginalized, it will itself be marginalized. This is God's poetic justice.

Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) 224.

By Frank Licorice - https://www.flickr.com/photos/71817546@N04/13893171652/, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32233899

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Should the church advocate for the poor in politics? If so, how?

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The well-respected Bread for the World Institute's analysis on hunger in America "consistently shows that the amount of food provided by government programs dwarfs charitable contributions by more than 9 to 1." When the funding is cut for food stamps and other critical programs, the faith community and nonprofits are overwhelmed with the long lines and new emergency needs.

Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014) 249, Kindle.

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Slide 23

Those most in jeopardy during Washington's debates and decisions are precisely the people the Bible clearly instructs us to protect and care for—the poorest and most vulnerable. In comparison to the power players of the political system, they have virtually no one lobbying on their behalf in these hugely important discussions about how public resources will be allocated.

As one of Washington's most influential political insiders told me, "If it wasn't for the constant and consistent pressure of you and your faith colleagues, those low-income people would not have been protected, because there are no champions for the poor in these houses of government."

Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to a World Divided* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014) 76, 79, Kindle.

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Modernist Christians believed the church was merely a social assistance or humanitarian agency through which the affluent could give handouts to the wretched poor. And cultural Christians believed the church was a safe haven away from the messiness of public, social, and even economic or political action. Instead of these problematic options, Kuyper fought to retain a distinctly Christian social witness against the evils of grueling poverty for the masses at the bottom in light of outrageous wealth and privilege for the few at the top.

Michael R. Wagenman, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019) chap. 6, Kindle.

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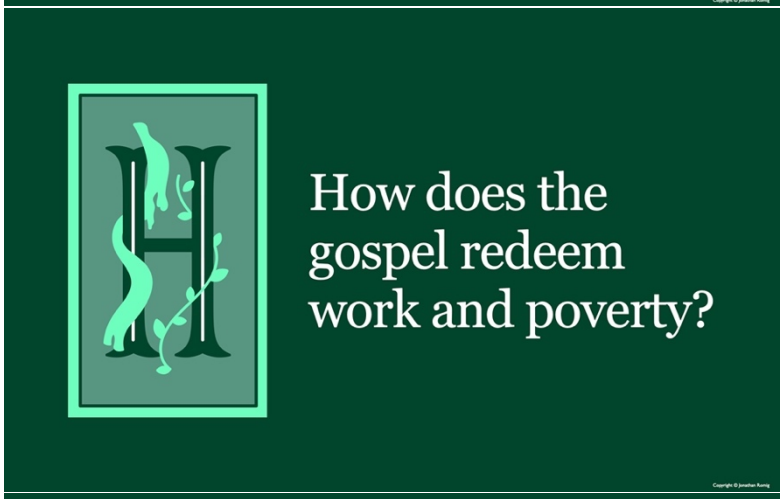

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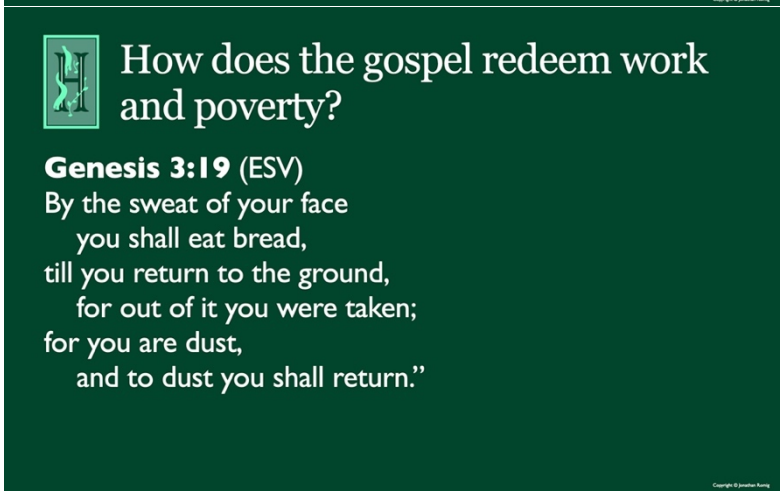
How does the gospel redeem work
and poverty?
Genesis 3:19 (ESV)
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

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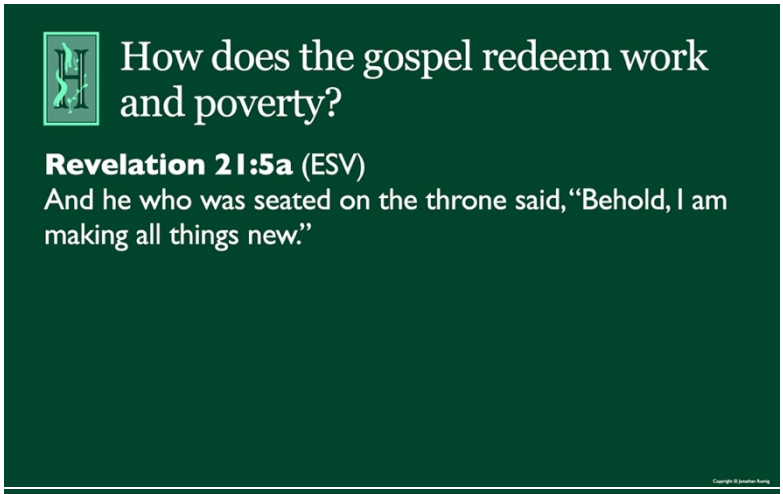
How does the gospel redeem work and poverty?
Revelation 21:5a (ESV)
And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

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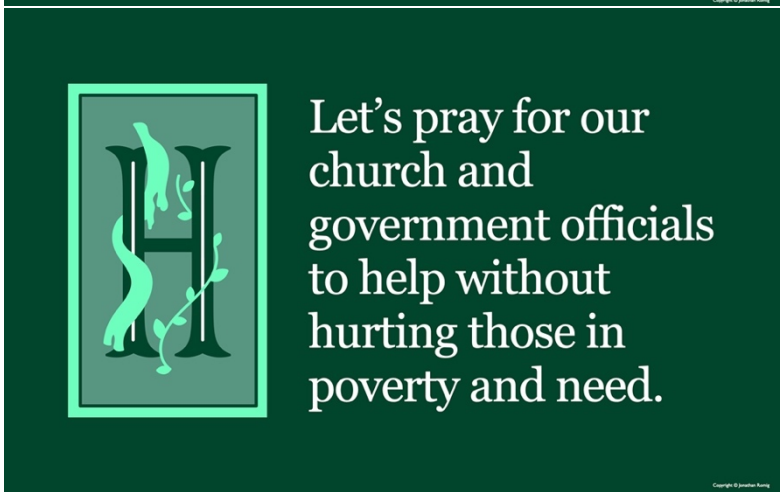

Revelation 21:1-6; 22:1-5

Faith & Flourishing in Politics:
A Flourishing Future

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / December 5th, 2021

(S1-2) I grew up in a mountain town in Colorado called Estes Park. Estes is famous for being the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. One of the tallest mountains in Colorado is right outside of town, a 14-thousand-footer named Long's Peak (14,259 feet). But growing up in Estes, I never climbed Long's Peak. We heard all the horror stories of people falling, getting stuck, and dying, and I didn't want to risk it.

And then I moved away to sea-level and decided, "Yeah, let's climb that mountain." Our group got up at 2:30 am, drove to the parking lot, already at about 9,500 feet of elevation, and started the 7.5-mile hike to the peak. The first part is easy. **(S3)** It's night, so you have flashlights, you're with a group, and you begin to hike. But then your group begins to spread out. Some go ahead, some lag behind, you trip on rocks and steps, but you get above tree-line after a while.

Then the sun starts to rise. **(S4)** And you see a sheer rock face and realize you have a long, steep, nearly impossible way to go. We started our series with A Vision of Flourishing from Genesis 1-3. In the beginning, God called people to seek the flourishing of their world, to take our world and make it better, to take creation to its mountain peak. Did you know in Ezekiel, God says the garden of Eden was "on the holy mountain of God."[1] All creation is supposed to experience this lush garden on God's mountain.

What happened? We fell down the mountain. Adam and Eve sought flourishing without God, and now we've all stumbled and struggle between flourishing and fallenness, between a high mountain garden and a low, dry desert. We're trying to get back to the mountain peak, but the night is long, and the climb is steep. But what if we knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we would make it to the top, to the garden?

(S5) God promises his people a flourishing future.

God sends the early church, a church struggling under the weight of persecution, a vision of a flourishing eternity. The disciple John, one of Jesus' twelve, receives a vision of a new heaven and earth and a glorious city coming down from heaven to rest on the earth at the end of time.

> **(S6) Revelation 21:1-3, 5** (ESV)
> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. . . .
>
> 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

It's not that there was a big bonfire, and God burns the whole world up. Instead, God is going to restore our planet. He's going to make it brand new again by bringing heaven down. Some people like to joke, "Jesus says, 'Behold, I make all things new,' not, 'Behold, I make all new things.'"[2] He's going to get rid of the bad stuff, bring new stuff, and make the good stuff better than it ever was before.[3]

(S7-9) When we got our nursery ready for our firstborn, I pulled up the carpet and found an old wooden floor underneath. I rented one of those super heavy floor sanders, stripped the floor, and did multiple coats of stain. I painted over the red walls with a light green, and it was like a brand-new room. Then I posted a bunch of photos on Facebook, perhaps too many. That's what God is going to do to our world. He's going to strip it down, stain it, paint it, make it brand-new, and show it off.

God promises beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will dwell with his people, the church, in this new heavens, earth, and eternal city. All creation will become a garden temple where God's presence will dwell. We can trust God will do this because he says it's as good as done.

> **(S10) Revelation 21:6a** (ESV)
> And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. . . .

God grounds this vision of our flourishing eternity in his character. His very being is at stake, his essence if he is God. If he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (A to Z), he knows how the story ends. And he shows us it ends as it began. God initially walked in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.[4] Revelation 21-22 shows a return to the garden and a city on a mountain like Eden.

> **(S11) Revelation 21:10** (ESV)
> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

The city comes down out of heaven to a great high mountain, like Eden. This is why I like telling my Long's Peak story. That's what humanity does. We try to climb the mountain, but without God. That's the tower of Babel and Babylon in every era. We try to go up, but we always need God to bring heaven down. That's grace, and that's what God does. God promises us a flourishing garden city just like Eden, where everyone who loves Jesus will enjoy him forever. And it's all dependent on God, not us. We don't have to create a political utopia in this life. God promises he will take us back to the garden in his timing.

> **(S12) Revelation 22:1-3** (ESV)
> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

Look at all the parallels between Genesis 2 and Revelation 22. God creates a garden in both. The tree of life is in both. A river flows from the garden in both. And both are on top of a mountain. And this future is certain. God promises the healing of the nations in a perfect garden city. No longer will there be partisanship or politics gone bad. We will have the best city with the best king where humankind will flourish forever.

In John 15, Jesus identifies himself with the Tree of Life.[5] Eternal life and flourishing come from him. He makes flourishing possible because he became cursed on a tree. Jesus faced the withering wrath of God's judgment. But like a seed falls to the ground and is buried in the ground, Jesus came back to life so that any who repent of their sins and believe in him can receive eternal life, eternal flourishing. Do you want to flourish? Come to the gardener.[6] He will forgive you and make you new. *God promises us a flourishing future*. And is that how this series ends? No, because we have not yet arrived at the mountain-top garden.

(S13-14) As you climb closer to Long's Peak, you go over a boulder field before arriving at a location called the "keyhole." And then, you get to the hard part. You go through the keyhole and along a ledge where you could injure yourself or die if you slip and fall. There's this one part where you have to climb on a metal bar pounded into the cliff. **(S15)** Then you climb the trough, which is like 30-flights of stairs at 13,000 feet.

I was so exhausted at this point I sat down and nearly gave up. I couldn't see the top, and I was done. That's what it is like to seek the flourishing of our world in a world that is fallen. The air is thin. But God doesn't want us to lose our vision of flourishing. As I was sitting at the top of the trough, a stranger came up and yelled at me, "If you don't make it to the top from here, *it's going to eat at you for the rest of your life*!" I'm not sure his advice was wise, but I kept climbing.

After another harrowing ledge and rock scramble, I reached the top. **(S16-17)** No garden. Just rocks and tired hikers, but the view was breathtaking. It was a clear blue day, and you could see across the Rockies and plains. A year later, I climbed Long's Peak again. But the second time around, I didn't go straight from sea level. I lived in Estes for a summer, trained, and hiked with the sure confidence that I'd already done it once and would reach the top again.

(S18-19) I'm going to put up some photos, and let's see if you can guess which was my first hike and which was my second. One I look exhausted, and the other I look happy. The first time I hiked that mountain, I didn't know if I could do it, but the second time I did. Our vision of the future impacts how we live today. What do we have to hope for if our future is bleak or if this life is all we have? But what if God has promised us with absolute certainty a flourishing garden-city future? Would that change how we live today?

(S20) We live differently in light of our flourishing future.

The vision God gives John, and the early Christians is supposed to comfort them and help them live differently in their present suffering. The church is experiencing immense persecution under Rome and its emperors. But what if you knew that you'd end up in a garden? You could face the lions with hope. Maybe we're not going to face lions today, but we do face donkeys and elephants and immense pressure to conform. But when the world presses in, we hear the shepherd's call to climb the mountain.

(S21) Matthew 5:14, 16 (ESV)
"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

What a minute. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus climbs up a mountain, sits down, maybe on a rock, perhaps it even looked like a throne, and teaches his followers to start living like they are in that Edenic mountain-top city already? Jerusalem and its temple were on a mountain. Couldn't the geopolitical kingdom of Judah do the job? No, only God's people, not Jerusalem or America, not London or Hong Kong, only we the church can be God's shining city on a hill. **(S22)** This is the "**Already but not yet**." The church is already supposed to be a shining city on a hill, even though we won't fully arrive till Christ's return.

Jesus did a perfect job of describing how his church can become a mountain-top garden-city people in the Sermon on the Mount, his political manifesto in Matthew 5-7. I've done a marginal job in our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* sermon series using the acronym "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." **(S23-30)**

F – Faith, Not Fear

L – Love God & Neighbor

O – Other Peoples' Good

U – Understanding & Wisdom

R – Reign of Christ

I – Image of God

S – Speak Prophetically

H – Help the Needy

(S31) "Flourish" is eight ways to work towards that Edenic vision God gave us in Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22. And we will get there. We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we will arrive at our eternal flourishing, which changes how we live and experience life today.

Have you heard about the supply-chain shortage? There's a backup of goods not being manufactured and shipped as quickly as consumers want. This has led some small businesses to hoard and stockpile inventory, which is a risky "gamble."[7] You might remember when the pandemic hit; everyone was worried about toilet paper, so we all hoarded it. If we believe our future is bleak or this is all we get, we'll hoard power, stockpile political wins, and vilify the opposing team. But if we believe our future is overflowing with abundance, we can share that flourishing today, even with our political enemies. *We live differently in light of our flourishing future*. But what if we try the way of flourishing and don't see any changes in our world?

(S32) The work of flourishing has eternal significance.

Any good work done for the flourishing of others has eternal worth. We see this in two places in Revelation.

(S33) Revelation 14:12-13 (ESV)
12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

God calls his people, his church, to endure, to keep loving God and our neighbors, even our enemies, everything we talked about in "F.L.O.U.R.I.S.H." Somehow, mysteriously, our work will make an eternal impact. Our deeds will follow us. So how we engage in work, even politics, has eternal significance.

Monica and I visited the "Museu Picasso" (Picasso Museum) in Barcelona on our Honeymoon. Picasso painted different styles throughout his life. When he was young, he painted masterpieces, and when he was old, he painted like a child. And for a season, he painted in shades of blue. **(S34)** One of his works is *The Crouching Beggar*, which shows an impoverished woman, wrapped in greens and blues, her eyes down, kneeling beside a street.[8] Maybe Picasso encountered someone like this in an alley in Barcelona.

(S35) Before Picasso painted his work, recent research using a x-ray scanner system has discovered that one of Picasso's students painted the countryside outside Barcelona.[9] **(S36)** And his student's painting, the mountains in the background, became the foundation of Picasso's work. One researcher said it was "Kind of a jazz riff back and forth."[10] Picasso incorporated his student's work into his work. That's what God does. He incorporates our good work into his masterpiece. *The work of flourishing has eternal significance*.

We don't live in a "winner takes all" world, but in a world where the way of flourishing wins in the end. Every good thing we do as individuals and the church body has worth, even as a country. John says this:

(S37) Revelation 21:24 (ESV)
By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

He's talking about the new Jerusalem, the eternal city filled with the glory of God and the light of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Even the nations will bring something worthwhile, their Picassos, into eternity. *The work of flourishing has eternal significance*.

So how do you want to engage in politics? Has this series changed our perspective as a church? We all have a choice. Will we fight against the culture, flee from it, give in and fuse our beliefs to it? Or will we practice faithful prophetic presence, seeking the common good and shalom because we know our eternal flourishing is secure? **(S38)** *God promises his people a flourishing future. We live differently in light of our flourishing future. The work of flourishing has eternal significance*.

I opened this sermon series by telling the true story of a man and woman planting trees in the desert, and slowly transforming their patch of desert into a forest. This week I watched a short story by French writer Jean Giono, written in 1953, called "The Man Who Planted Trees."[11]

They didn't have YouTube in 1953, but someone made his short story into a 30-minute video. Christopher Plummer narrates it. It's great.

The Man Who Planted Trees begins with the story of a young man going on a long walk before World War I. As he walks through the French Alps, he encounters a barren wilderness where there's nothing but ruined homes, desolation, hopelessness, and despair. The people who try to live there slowly go crazy.

But the young man encounters a shepherd in this wilderness. He spends the night in his home and is intrigued when the shepherd begins to pick and choose one hundred perfect acorns. The next day the shepherd takes the young man to a barren stretch of ground where he takes his iron shepherd's staff and breaks the soil up. Then he carefully plants each acorn, one at a time.

He plants one hundred that day, but it turns out that he has planted 100,000 acorns. The shepherd is concerned for the environment, for the wasteland, and wants to restore it to life. The young man continues on his journey, and after the Great War full of death and violence, he returns to the barren wilderness. This time the wilderness is full of 10,000 short-trees he can see over, a young, beautiful forest.

The shepherd had planted 100,000 acorns. Most have not sprung up, and others have perished, but still, 10,000 new trees remained. That's what we're doing when we do the work of flourishing. We're planting acorns with the hope that God can do a greater work of revitalization. The young man commits to returning to the shepherd every couple of years. We keep coming back to Christ, our shepherd, seeing what he can do.

As the shepherd plants threats come, forestry experts, loggers, politicians. But over many years, the shepherd tends and cares for the forest, no longer a shepherd but a keeper of bees. When the shepherd dies by the end of the story, a barren stretch of the French Alps has transformed into a forest teaming with life and people.

That's what God calls us, his people, the church, to do—to seek the work of flourishing, shalom, and the common good in the wilderness. We just follow Christ, our chief shepherd, as he does the work of flourishing in our world. *Jesus promises his people and our world a flourishing future.*

Benediction - **Psalm 90:16-17** (ESV)

Let your work be shown to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church as part of his Doctor of Ministry research study through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Spiritual Exercises

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to my tenth and final sermon from our *Faith & Flourishing in Politics* series, *A Flourishing Future*. Here are several follow-up spiritual exercises for continuing to learn and grow:

Listen (sermon): Listen to Tim Mackie's fifth and final sermon in the book of Daniel, "5. Resurrection Hope - Faithfulness in Exile [Daniel] - Tim Mackie (The Bible Project)" (56:14). I encourage you to check out all five sermons. Still, this one (like #2) ties in exceptionally well to our closing sermon as Mackie teaches on Daniel's vision of Christ's return and creation's eternal flourishing.

Short Story: Watch the short film, based on the short story, entitled "The Man Who Planted Trees" from "French author Jean Giono, published in 1953." Kaitlyn Schiess compares this man to the church. She writes, "This single man—'one man, one body, one spirit' the narrator calls him, much like the church—is an apt illustration of the commission and possibility of the church in a fallen world, a church that knows what the end of the story looks like and strives to realize some portion of it here and now." YouTube: https://youtu.be/PYlsIZXCQa4 (30:08)

Read (intermediate): Read *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of Our Neighbor* by Kaitlyn Schiess (220 pages; paperback, Audible, Kindle). If you wonder how politics affects our spiritual life, including what we worship and where we find security, I recommend Schiess's book. If you've been a part of our Christian Education class, you know she has had a huge influence on my thinking. This book is a good next step if you want to keep the learning going. For an introduction to Schiess and her book, check out her interview on the *Holy Post* podcast, "420: Four False Political Gospels with Kaitlyn Schiess" (Starts 10:26). I enjoy the *Holy Post* podcast and recommend anyone listen to it for author interviews and Christian analysis of the news.

Worship: Listen to "The Porter's Gate - We Labor Unto Glory (feat. Liz Vice, Josh Garrels, & Madison Cunningham)" on YouTube (3:48). This song reminds us that whatever work we do in this world, even the work of politics, can be done unto the glory of God.

Thank you so much for being a part of this sermon series on faith and politics. I hope you've learned some biblical truths that will help you follow Jesus into all of life, even politics.

God bless,
Pastor Jonathan Romig

P.S. If you are participating in my Research Study for my Doctor of Ministry, I will be sending out my follow-up survey with instructions shortly. If you did not fill out my first survey but would like to complete my closing survey, please email me.

1. Ezekiel 28:13-14.

2. Andy Crouch. …

3. See Stephen Witmer, *Eternity Changes Everything* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2014) 17-23, Kindle.

4. Genesis 3:8, 23-24.

5.John 15:1-11.

6. John 20:15.

7. Sapna Maheshwari and Coral Murphy Marcos, "Supply Chain Problems Have Small Retailers Gambling on Hoarding," The New York Times, published November 30, 2021, accessed December 4, 2021 https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/30/business/small-retailers-hoarding-supply-chain.html.

8. "La Miséreuse accroupie," 1000 | Museums presents: Focus on Pablo Picasso, published 2018, accessed December 1, 2021 https://focusonpicasso.com/product/la-misereuse-accroupie/.

9. Pallab Ghosh, "New scanning technique reveals secret behind great paintings," BBC News, published February 17, 2018, accessed December 1, 2021 https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-43088339.

10. Kenneth Chang, "In Picasso's Blue Period, Scanners Find Secrets He Painted Over," The New York Times, published February 20, 2018, accessed Decembrer 1, 2021 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/science/picasso-blue-period-scans.html.

11. Jean Giono, "The Man Who Planted Trees," translated by Jean Roberts, Société Radio-Canada Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1987, YouTube published January 16, 2012, accessed December 2, 2021 https://youtu.be/PYlsIZXCQa4. I learned of this story from Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 176-177. Kindle.

#10 Sermon Slides

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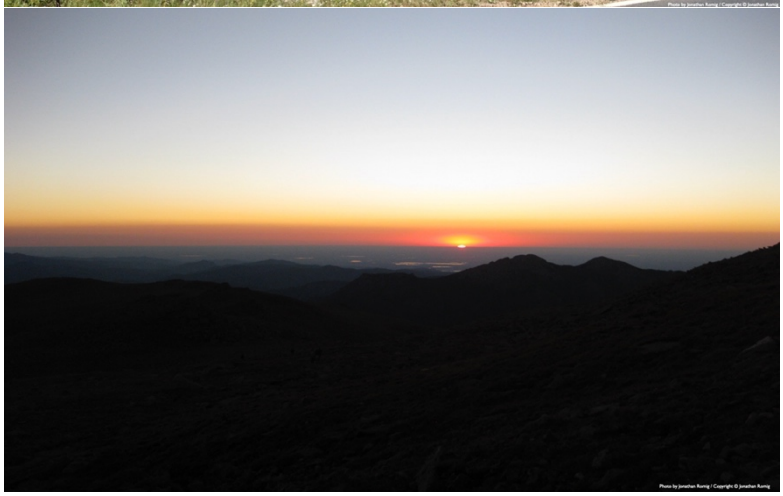
Slide 3



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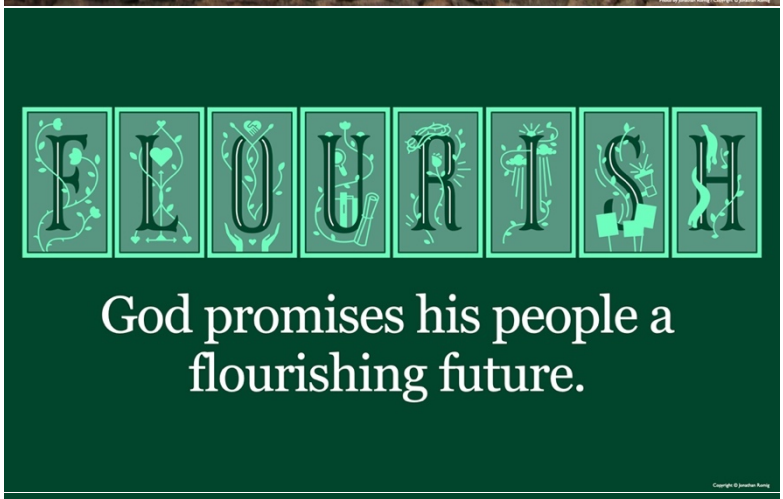

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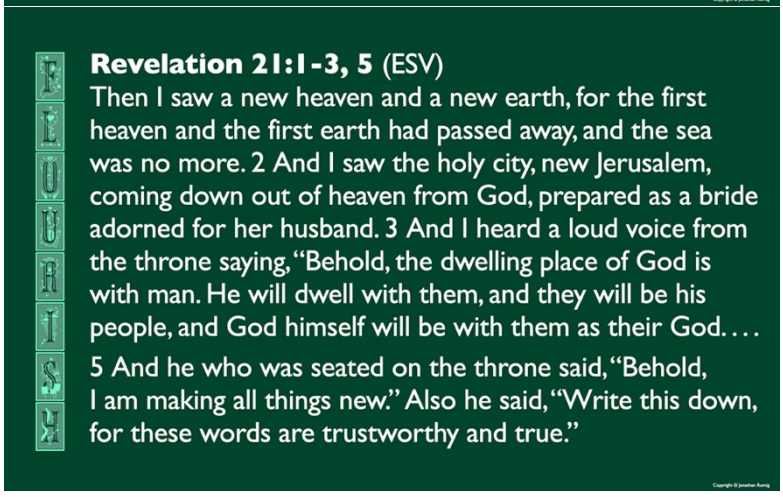
FLOURISH
Revelation 21:1-3, 5 (ESV)
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. . . .
5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

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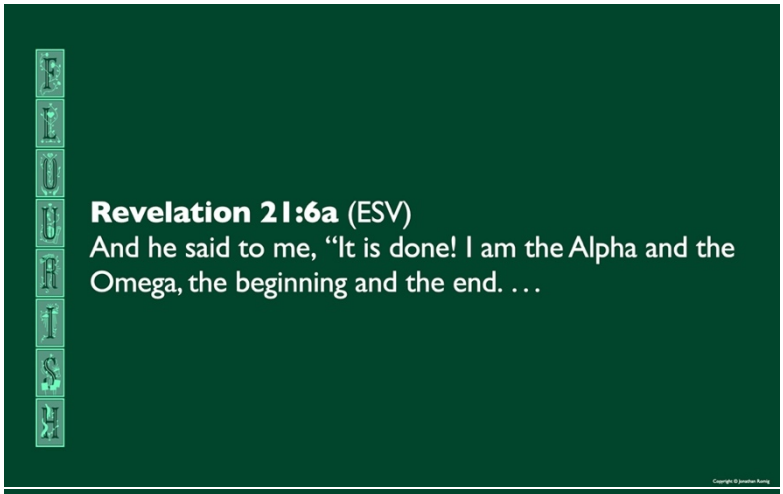

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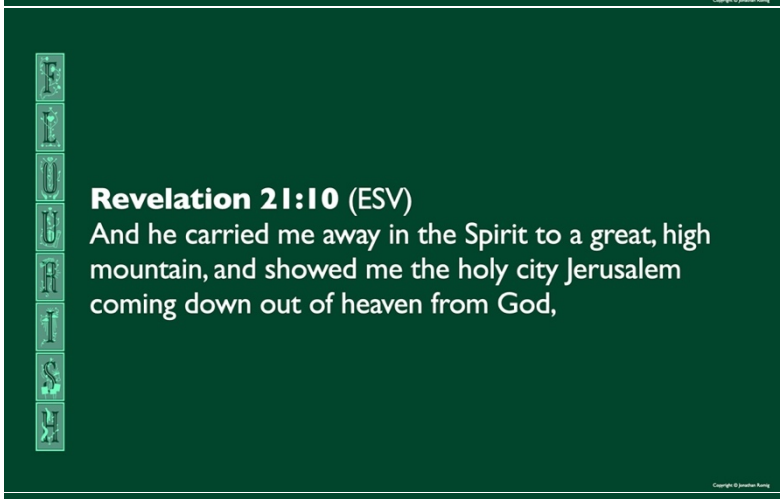
FUTURISM
Revelation 21:10 (ESV)
And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

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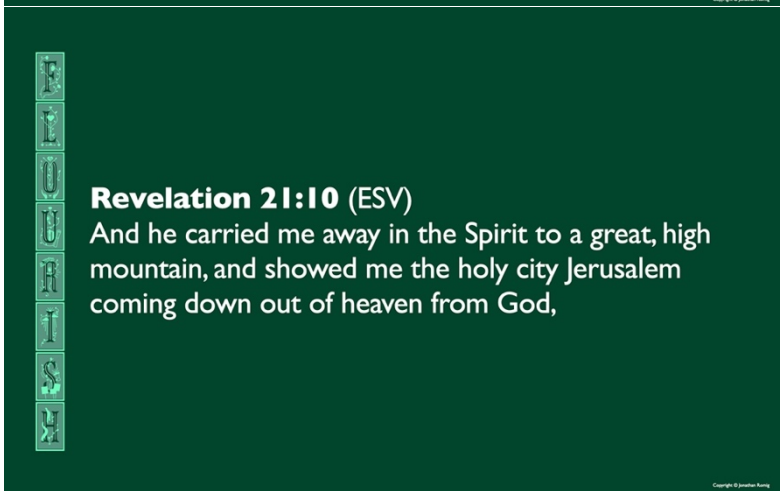
FUTURISM
Revelation 21:10 (ESV)
And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

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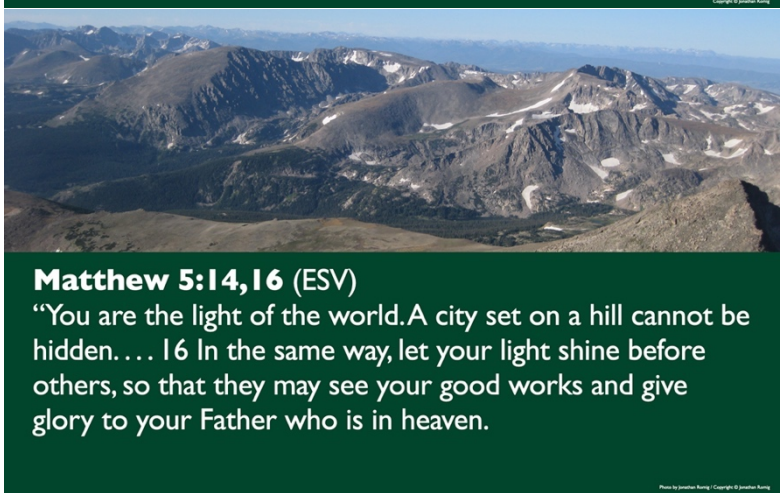
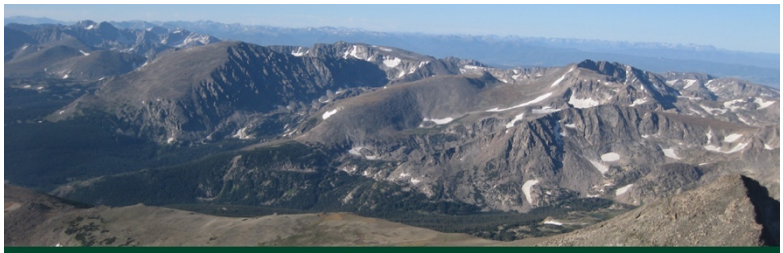

Matthew 5:14,16 (ESV)
"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Slide 22



Matthew 5:14,16 (ESV)
"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Already but not yet.

Photo by Jonathan Romig | Copyright © Jonathan Romig

Slide 23

Faith, Not Fear

Copyright © Jonathan Romig

Slide 24

Love God & Neighbor

Copyright © Jonathan Romig

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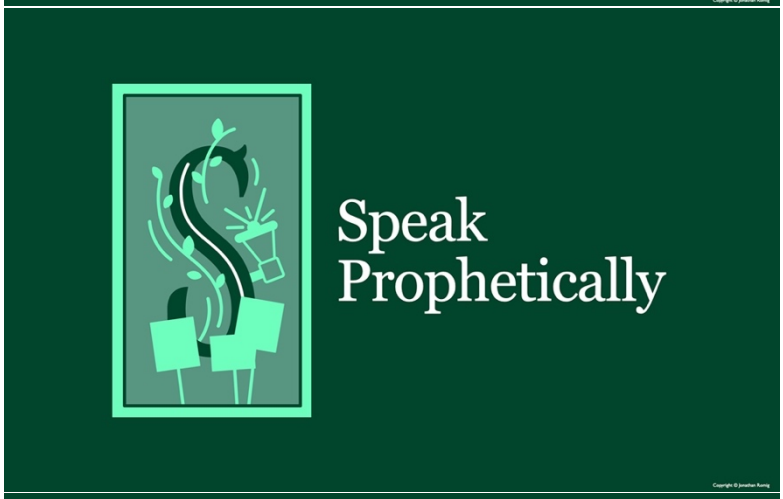

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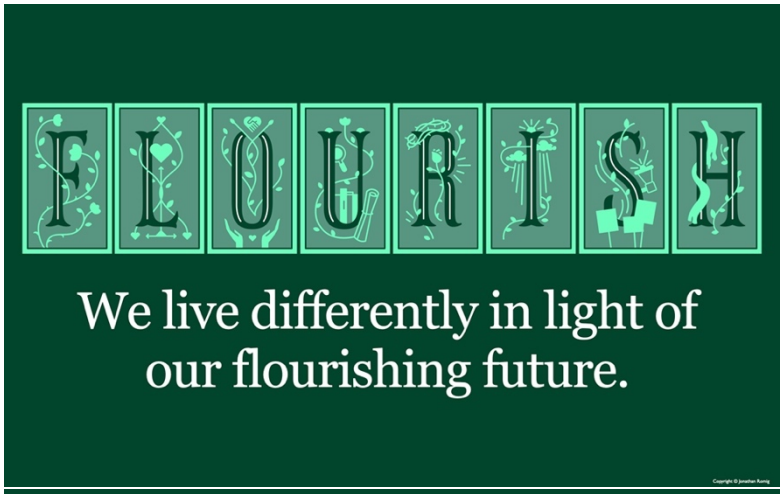

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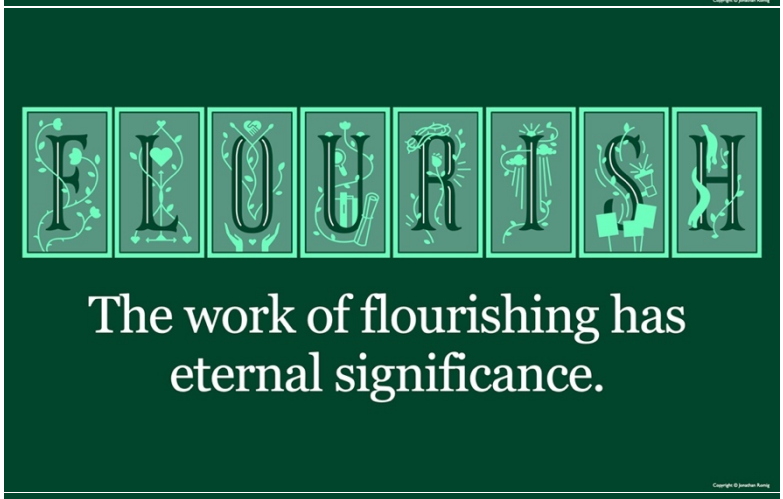

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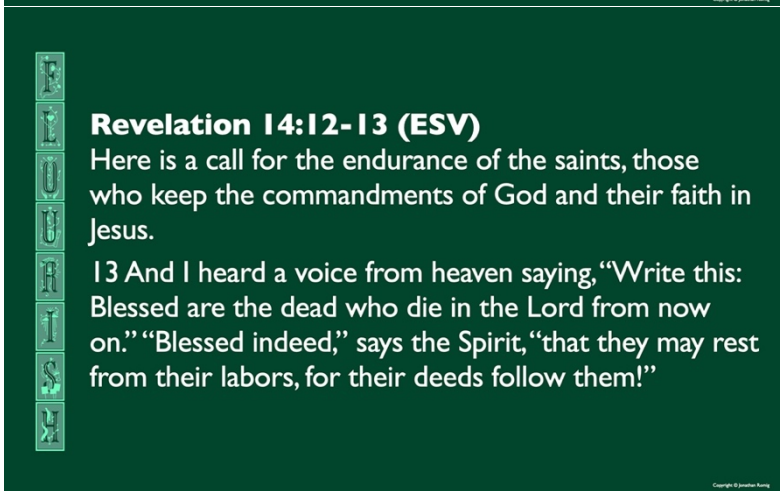
FLOURISH
Revelation 14:12-13 (ESV)
Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.
13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

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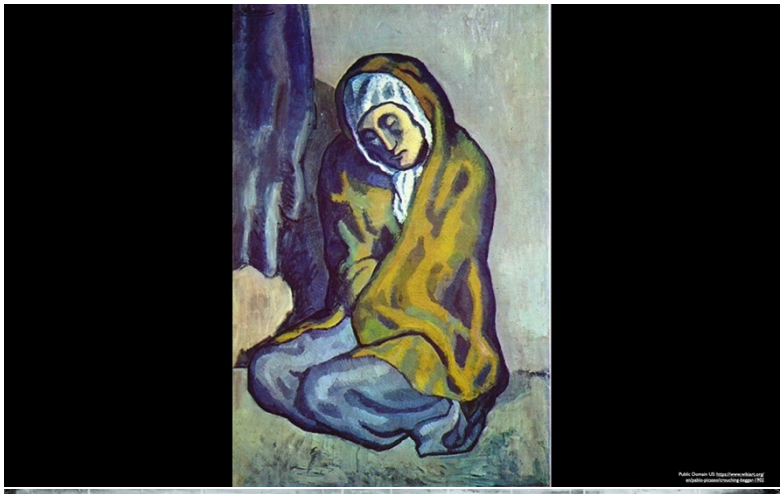

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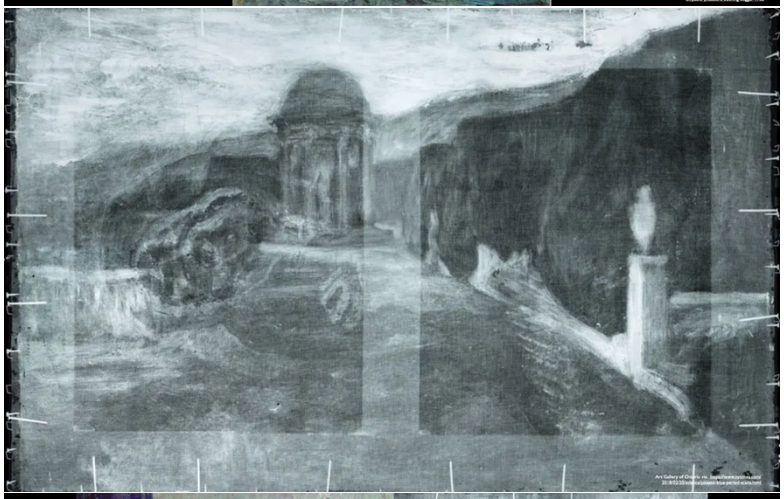

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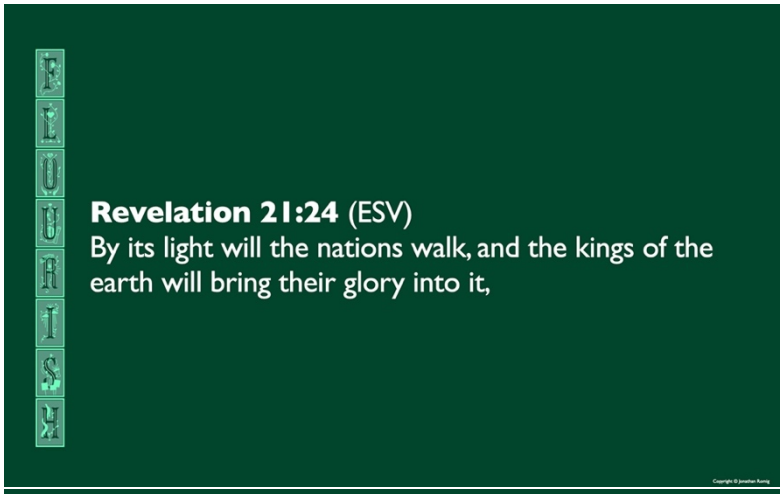

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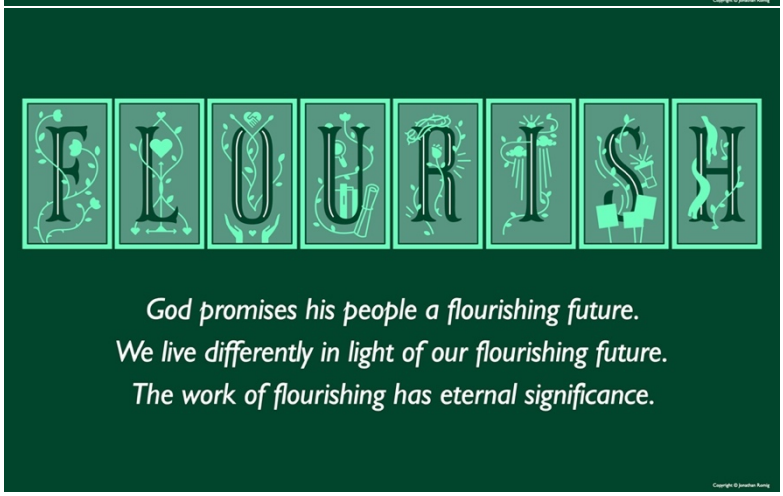
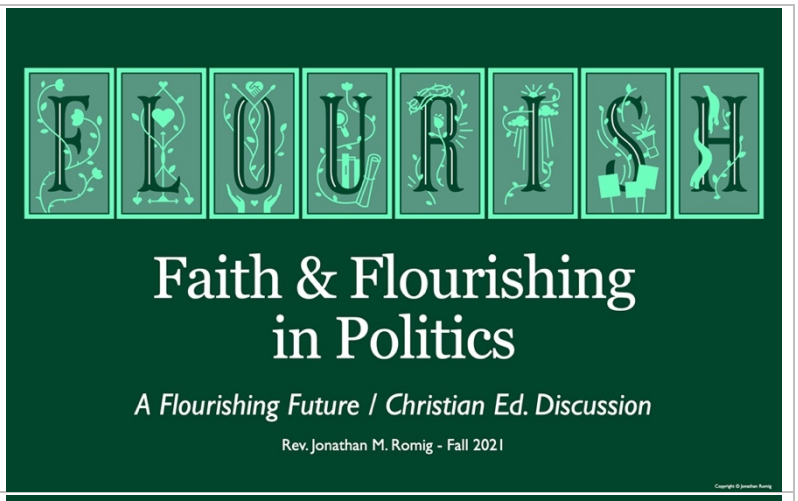

FLOURISH
God promises his people a flourishing future.
We live differently in light of our flourishing future.
The work of flourishing has eternal significance.

#10 Christian Education Slides

Slide 1	
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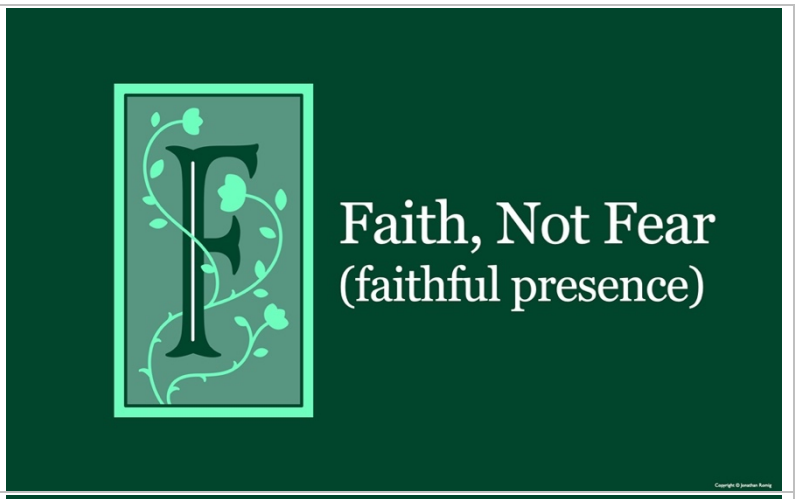
Slide 4	
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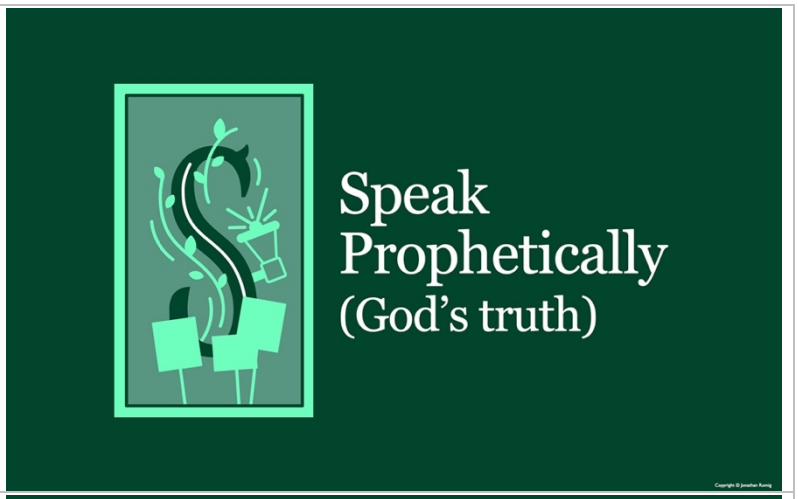
Slide 10	
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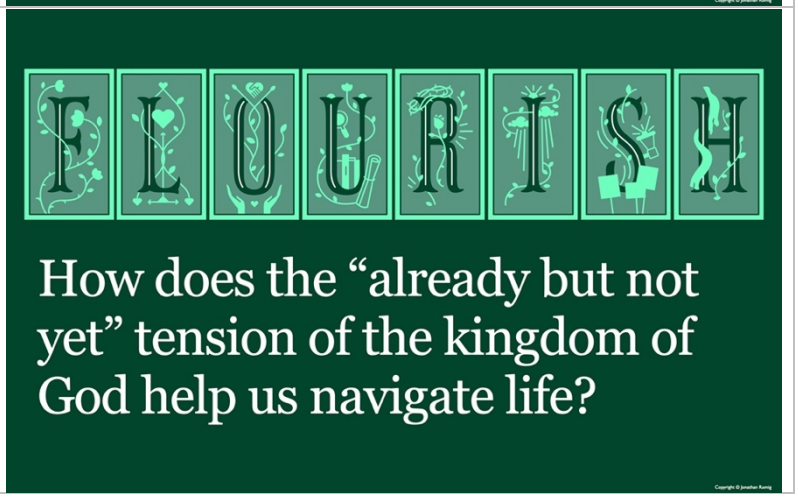
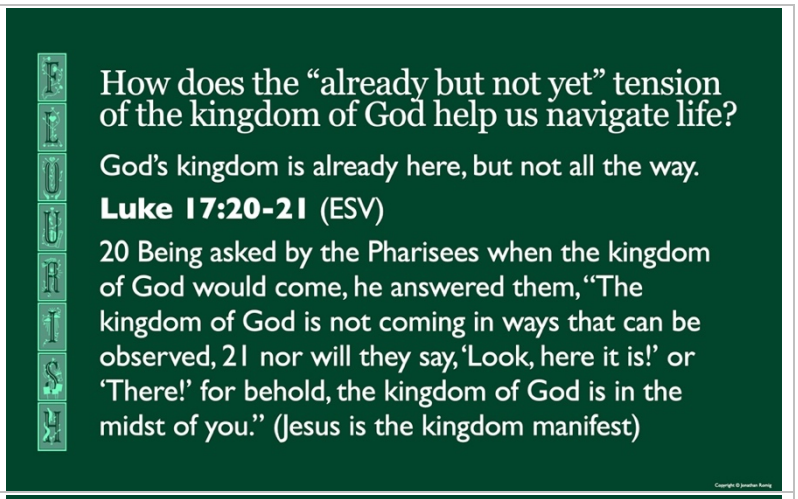
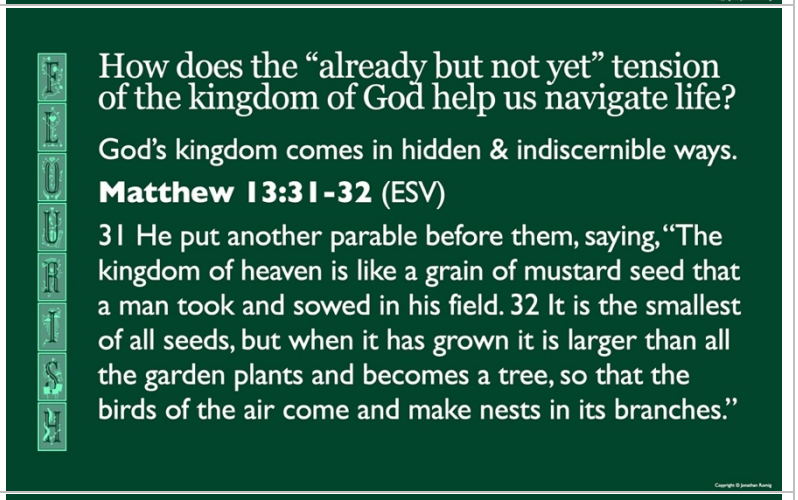
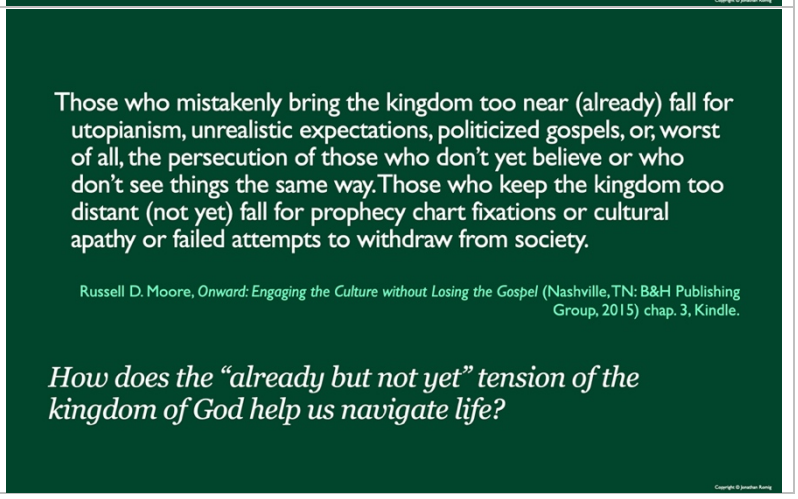
Slide 12	

Slide 13	
Slide 14	
Slide 15	

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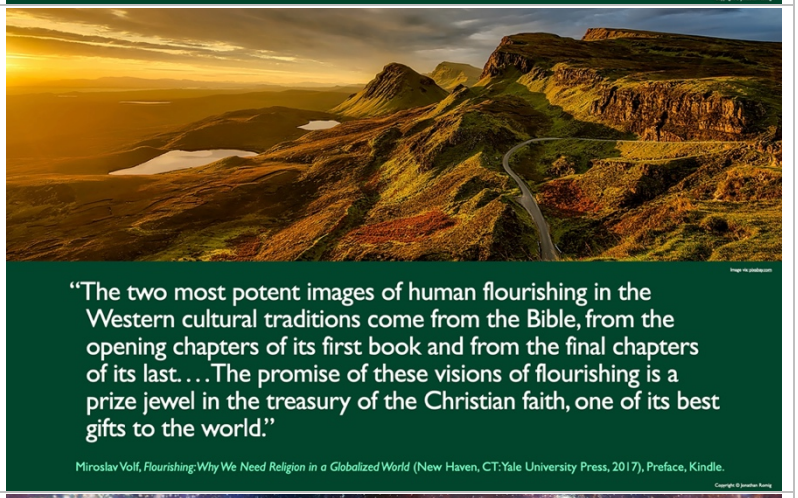
Slide 17	
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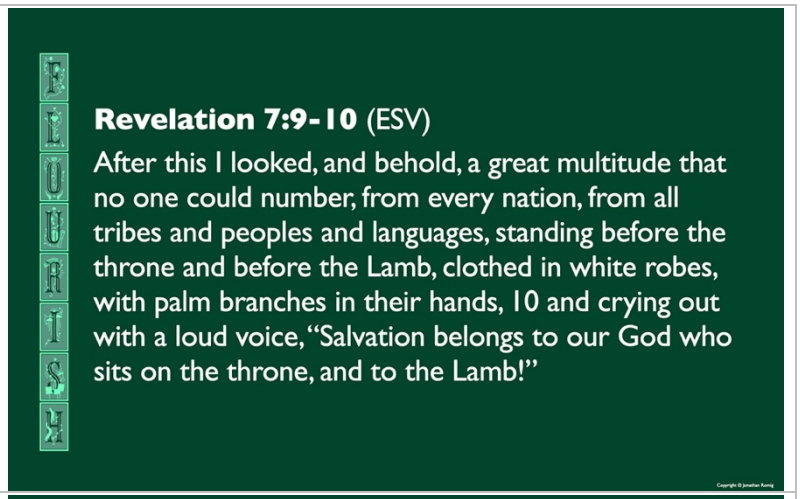
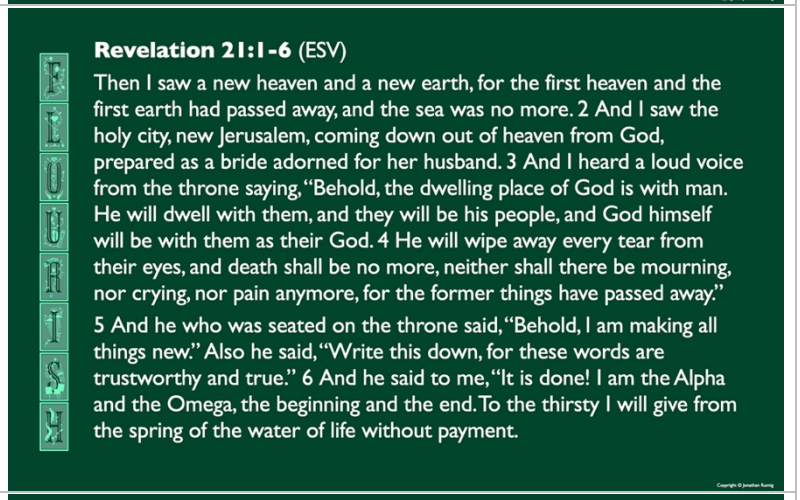
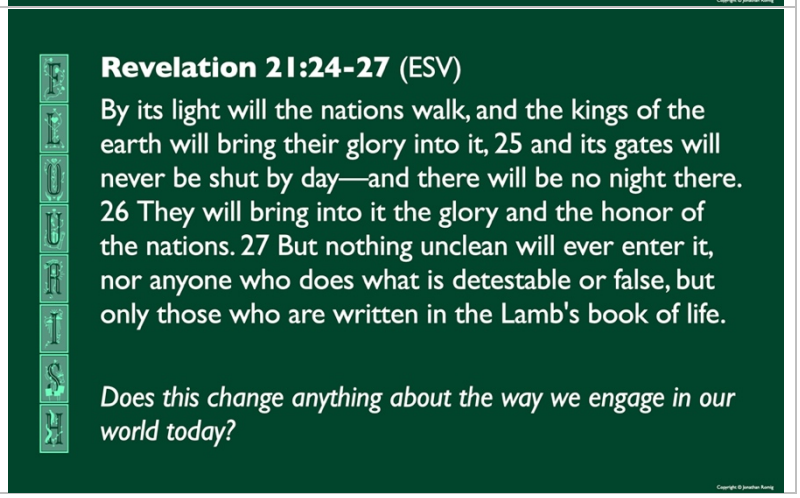
Slide 19	
Slide 20	
Slide 21	

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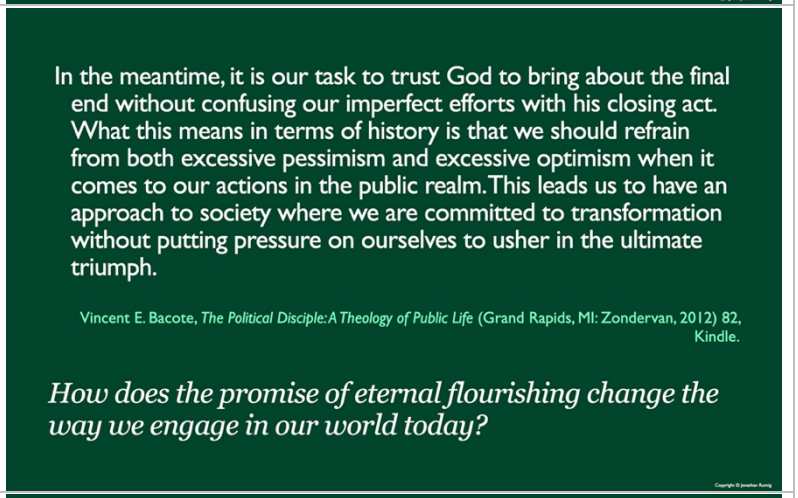
Slide 23	
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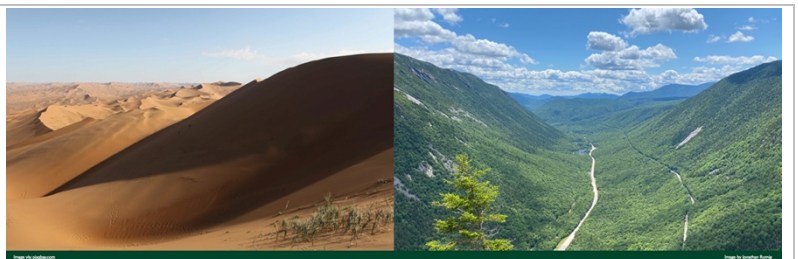
Slide 25	 **Psalm 90:16-17** (ESV) Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!
Slide 26	 We are working on earth with the knowledge that every true work of human flourishing, done in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a preview of the day that God's good creation is redeemed. Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of our Neighbor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 177. Kindle.
Slide 27	 **Revelation 14:13** (ESV) And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

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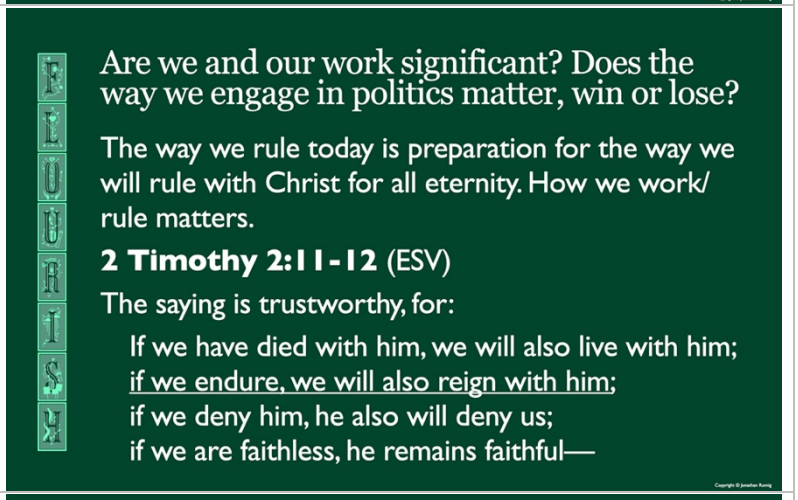
Slide 29	
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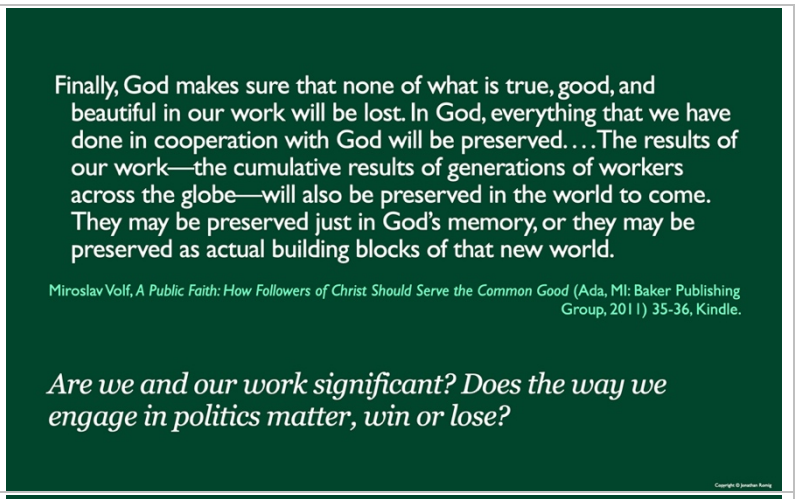
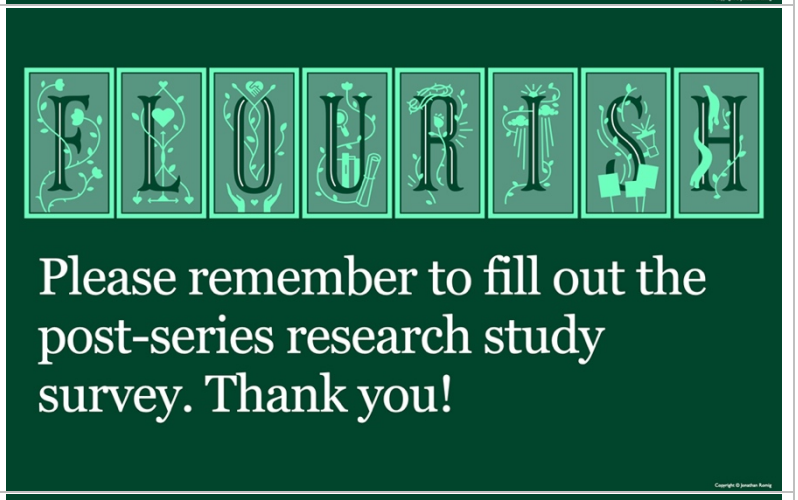
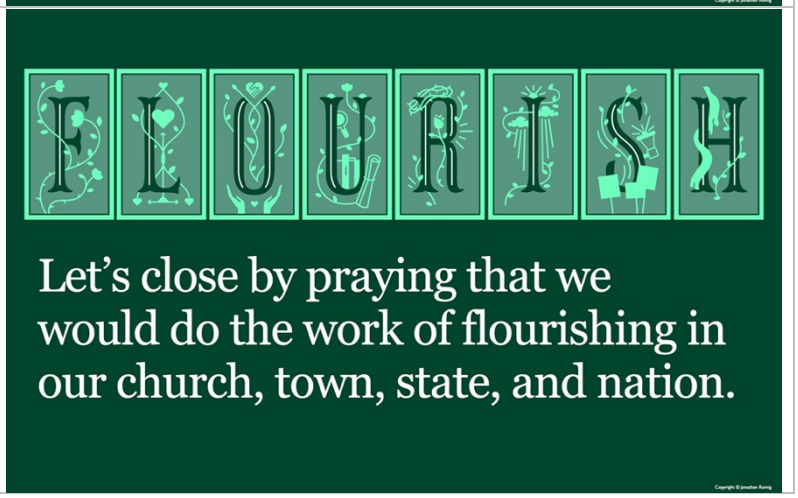
Slide 31	
Slide 32	
Slide 33	

Slide 34	**Numbers 6:24-26** (ESV) The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

APPENDIX B:

IRB & SURVEYS

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Flourish: Concepts, Commands, and Conversations for Common-Good Faith and Politics in the Church
Principal Investigator: Rev. Jonathan Romig, Doctorate of Ministry

* Required

Purpose

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to see if the teaching and discussion of the biblical concepts and commands of human flourishing and the common good will give participants a theological framework for engaging civilly in faith and politics. The researcher will teach these concepts in the "Faith & Flourishing in Politics" sermon series and accompanying Christian Education class, which will include time for discussion.

To measure the effectiveness of the teaching series, the researcher will administer a church-wide survey before and after the teaching series. This survey will gain a baseline understanding of participant's current approach to integrating their faith and politics and measure if anything changes as a result of the teaching series. The results will be used to help determine if this is an effective way for pastors and churches to approach discipleship in faith and politics, or if changes should be made to the curriculum. The results will be published in the researcher's doctorate of ministry thesis paper and may be used for future writing and publications.

All participants are invited to contribute their unique perspective, as a variety of opinions, impressions, and responses will provide the best data possible. It is imperative that participants offer their honest and fair assessment, and not feel pressured or influenced by their personal relationship with the researcher.

The purpose of this consent form is to give participants (or their parents/legal guardians) the information they will need to help them decide whether to be in the study or not. Participants/signers may ask any questions about the research, what participants will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, all rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

The researcher is inviting you, and or your youth (13 or older), to become participants in this research study because you/they are a member or attender of Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA.

Procedures

If the participants (or their legal guardian/parent) agrees to join the study, their involvement will last for approximately 11 weeks. This includes a 10-week sermon series, and 10-weeks of Christian Education. The Christian Education lesson and discussion follows a week behind the sermon series. Each sermon is approximately 35 minutes, which is a part of Cornerstone Congregational Church's typical 60-75 minute church service. Each Christian Education class is approximately 60 minutes.

The following procedures are involved in this study. Pastor Jonathan will launch the project sermon series on Sunday, October 3rd, at Cornerstone Congregational Church's 10:30 am church service. The teaching series will run 10 weeks until the currently expected end-date of December 5th. This end date depends on any interruptions in the sermon series. The accompanying Christian Education class lesson and discussion will begin Sunday, October 10th, from 8:30-9:30 am and run each week through December 12th, 2021. Total time commitment is about 2.0-2.25 hours every Sunday from 8:30 till 9:30 and 10:30 till 11:45 am for 11 weeks.

The teaching series will cover topics such as the biblical role of politics in human flourishing and theological concepts to remember when engaging in politics.

A survey will be administered twice, once before the first sermon and once following the last Christian Education class, which will take approximately 15-30 minutes each time. Each participant will need to complete both surveys individually. Upon completion of the second survey, participation in the study will be complete.

Risks

The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are as follows:
1. Socially sensitive political and theological beliefs participants have held privately may become known publicly during discussion, or to the researcher by answering the survey questions.
2. Relationships and church body may experience conflict or disagreement due to addressing faith and politics.
3. Long-held beliefs may be called into question, potentially resulting in change of beliefs, cognitive dissonance, or strong emotions, such as feelings of frustration and/or anger.
4. All survey answers and class-discussions may be incorporated into the research study, final doctorate of ministry thesis paper, and potentially future writings and publications.

The following procedures will be followed to minimize identified risks:
1. Participants will not be forced to disclose privately held beliefs or opinions, may choose not to participate in group conversation if they feel uncomfortable, and may turn off their Zoom camera or change their Zoom name if desired.
2. The researcher will introduce the importance of civility for discussing faith and politics and will act as a facilitator/mediator for group discussion in order to foster mutual-respect and unity within the church body.
3. The researcher's intention is not to change participants' political party or direct their voting, but to help participants engage respectfully, learn and apply key theological concepts, and to develop a biblical and theological framework for navigating faith and politics.
4. No personal information (name/email address) will be required to fill out the survey forms, which will then be stored in Pastor Jonathan Romig's Microsoft Office 365 account and a confidential, password-protected file on the researcher's computer. In the event of any report or publication from this study, the participant's identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in such a way that participants cannot be identified, such as through summary or anonymous quotation.

Benefits

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of participation in this study are:
1. A change of perspective on how the Bible leads Christians to participate in politics;
2. The development of a biblical and theological framework for navigating faith and politics;
3. A new understanding of the biblical concepts of human flourishing and the common good.
4. Increased self-awareness and civility for engaging in political discussions;
5. Meaningful conversations resulting in deeper interpersonal relationships and church unity;
6. Other; practical or spiritual benefits.

It is the researcher's hope that other pastors and churches may benefit as a result of this study. This Research Study should help the researcher review, analyze, and potentially make changes to the curriculum and/or methodology for future use and publication.

Compensation

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

Confidentiality

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. No personal information (name/email address) will be required to fill out the survey forms, which will be stored on Microsoft Office365 in Pastor Jonathan Romig's account and in a confidential password-protected file on the researcher's computer. In the event of any report or publication from this study, the participant's identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in such a way that participants cannot be identified, such as through summary or anonymous quotation.

The Christian Education class will be recorded through Zoom but not published on the website or social media. Class sessions will be uploaded to Cornerstone Congregation's Google Drive so those who are not able to attend directly or miss a week can still participate and stay current. These recordings may also help Pastor Jonathan's follow-up analysis. The congregation's Google Drive folder is shared via the weekly bulletin (see "Elder meeting minutes link") and there are some previous class links posted to Facebook. Thus it is theoretically possible that the public could access the recordings. However, Pastor Jonathan will not actively share the recordings beyond the congregation. As previously stated, class participants do not have to talk and may turn off their Zoom camera or change their Zoom name if desired.

This Informed Consent Form will require personal identification and contact information.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. The participant may choose not to take part at all. Participants do not need to take part in this research study to attend the church service or the Christian Education class, but participation is highly desired and greatly valued. If you, or the teenager you are signing for, agree to participate in this study, you or they may stop participating at any time. If an individual decides not to take part, or if they stop participating at any time, their decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which they may otherwise be entitled. If an individual participates in the first survey but does not complete the final survey, the data from the first survey will still be included in the analysis of the teaching series as there is no way to identify individual surveys with specific participants.

Questions

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Rev. Jonathan Romig, 978-398-6433, pastorjromig@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Dr. David A. Currie, at: dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu or 978-646-4176.

Signature Lines: Researcher & Participant

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study, and/or consent to allow youth 13 years of age or older for whom you are the parent or legal guardian to participate.

Please contact Rev. Jonathan Romig if you would like a PDF copy of this form or would like to complete the survey using a hardcopy: 978-398-6433 / pastorjromig@gmail.com. If you would like a copy of your form, please print a pdf BEFORE submitting (Shortcuts: PC = ctrl + P // Mac = command + P).

Researcher Statement: I have communicated the risks involved in this research with the participant. I am inferring that their completion of this online Informed Consent Form indicates that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study. Digitally Signed: Rev. Jonathan M. Romig, Researcher

1. Please enter your electronic signature (type your name) below: *

2. If applicable, please enter the names of anyone under 18, but 13 years of age or older, who you give permission to participate in the study for whom you are the parent or legal guardian:

3. Please enter your email address and those of all participants you are giving permission to participate: *

4. Today's date: *

Format: M/d/yyyy

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Microsoft Forms

1/7/2022

Faith & Flourishing in Politics Pre-Series Survey

*This is the pre-teaching series survey. All participants will receive a separate survey after the completion of the sermon series and Christian Education hour.

**If you or your parent or legal guardian have not already filled out the Informed Consent Form, please do so BEFORE filling out this survey. Thank you.

Please contact Rev. Jonathan Romig if you would like to complete a hardcopy of this survey: 978-398-6433 / pastorjromig@gmail.com. Or you can print out this form and submit it in-person or by mail. If you would like a copy of your form with your answers, please print a pdf BEFORE submitting (Shortcuts: PC = ctrl + P // Mac = command + P).

I recommend filling out your answers in a separate document, such as Word or Pages, and then copying and pasting your answers into the survey. This way if your internet experiences a break in connection, you will still have all your answers to resubmit them.

All participants are invited to contribute their unique perspective, as a variety of opinions, impressions, and responses will provide the best data possible. It is imperative that participants offer their honest and fair assessment, and not feel pressured or influenced by their personal relationship with the researcher.

This survey closes Sunday, October 3rd, at 10:30 AM. *The deadline has been extended to Sunday, October 10th, at 8:30 AM.

Estimated time to complete: 15-30 minutes.

* Required

1. I plan to participate in this Research Study by (please check all that apply): *

- [ ] Attending/listening to the Sermon Series
- [ ] Attending the Christian Education class
- [ ] I do not plan to participate (no need to fill out survey)

2. In your experience, how often has your pastor or church addressed politics or political issues? *

- ( ) Always
- ( ) Very Often
- ( ) Sometimes
- ( ) Rarely
- ( ) Never

3. How equipped do you feel to address political issues from a biblical perspective? *

- Very High
- Above Average
- Average
- Below Average
- Very Low

4. Is it possible to have a mutually respectful and beneficial conversation about faith and politics without causing division within the local church? *

- Definitely
- Very Probably
- Probably
- Possibly
- Probably Not
- Definitely Not

5. Which political party, if any, are you currently registered with? *

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Libertarian Party
- Green-Rainbow Party
- Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)
- Not registered to vote
- Prefer not to answer
- Other

6. In your own words, how do you identify yourself politically? *

7. How do you determine which candidates and policies to vote for/against? *

8. What sources have shaped your current political position? (Note: The term "sources" refers to any people, parties, organizations, books, media, or other things that have influenced the way you interact in faith and politics.) *

9. What specific biblical or theological concepts shape the way you engage in politics? *

10. Do you have a biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics? (Note: A theological framework is a lens, grid, or paradigm to analyze a particular issue, like politics using Biblical truths and principles. A framework is more focused than a general Christian worldview and offers a filter to address political concerns.) *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe/unsure
- Prefer not to answer
- Other

11. Depending on how you answered questions 8-9, please briefly explain the biblical and theological concepts and/or framework you use in your political engagement (even if answered "Maybe/unsure").

12. What should faithful Christian participation in politics today look like? *

13. Conversely, what does unfaithful Christian participation in politics today look like? *

14. Are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote for? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation. *

15. Conversely, are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote against? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation. *

16. How do you feel about someone who generally votes politically opposite/different than you? *

17. What do you think of the spiritual state of those who generally vote politically opposite/different than you? *

18. How should Christians behave when addressing political issues and disagreements? *

19. What is your impression and/or understanding of concepts like "human flourishing" and "the common good"? *

20. Is there anything else you would like to add about your faith-based political engagement?

1/7/2022

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Faith & Flourishing in Politics Post-Series Survey

Once you have completed this survey, your participation in the Research Study is complete.

Please contact Rev. Jonathan Romig if you would like to complete a hardcopy of this survey: 978-398-6433 / pastorjromig@gmail.com. Or you can print out this form and submit it in-person or by mail. If you would like a copy of your form with your answers, please print a pdf BEFORE submitting (Shortcuts: PC = ctrl + P // Mac = command + P).

I recommend filling out your answers in a separate document, such as Word or Pages, and then copying and pasting your answers into the survey. This way if your internet experiences a break in connection, you will still have all your answers to resubmit them.

All participants are invited to contribute their unique perspective, as a variety of opinions, impressions, and responses will provide the best data possible. It is imperative that participants offer their honest and fair assessment, and not feel pressured or influenced by their personal relationship with the researcher.

This survey closes Sunday, December 19th, at 11:59 PM.

Estimated time to complete: 15-30 minutes.

* Required

1. Did you complete the pre-series survey? *

Those who did not take the pre-series survey are still eligible to fill-out this survey, but must note here that they did not take the pre-series research study survey and are required to complete the informed consent form.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No (I have completed the informed-consent form.)

2. For those who filled-out the pre-series survey, what are 2-3 key phrases or answers you gave that could help me identify and compare your first survey results? Please be as specific and detailed as possible. *

If you saved your answers in a file, please copy and paste some of those answers verbatim here. While I should have created a unique-way to identify individual survey results from before and after with each other (i.e., compare apples to apples), I did not realize this methodology error until after I administered the first survey. If you did not fill out the pre-series survey, and are only completing the post-series survey, please write "NA." Thank you.

3. Number of Faith & Flourishing in Politics sermons I listened to: *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Number of Faith & Flourishing in Politics Christian Education classes I participated in/reviewed:

If zero, please skip.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. In your experience, how often has your pastor or church addressed politics or political issues? *

- Always
- Very Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

6. How equipped do you feel to address political issues from a biblical perspective? *

- Very High
- Above Average
- Average
- Below Average
- Very Low

7. Is it possible to have a mutually respectful and beneficial conversation about faith and politics without causing division within the local church? *

- Definitely
- Very Probably
- Probably
- Possibly
- Probably Not
- Definitely Not

8. Which political party, if any, are you currently registered with? *

- ○ Democratic Party
- ○ Republican Party
- ○ Libertarian Party
- ○ Green-Rainbow Party
- ○ Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)
- ○ Not registered to vote
- ○ Prefer not to answer
- ○ Other

9. Has anything changed in your thinking as a result of participating in the Faith & Flourishing in Politics sermon series and/or Christian Education class? *

10. In your own words, how do you identify yourself politically? *

11. How do you determine which candidates and policies to vote for/against? *

12. What sources have shaped your current political position? (Note: The term "sources" refers to any people, parties, organizations, books, media, or other things that have influenced the way you interact in faith and politics.) *

13. What specific biblical or theological concepts shape the way you engage in politics? *

14. Do you have a biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics? (Note: A theological framework is a lens, grid, or paradigm to analyze a particular issue, like politics using Biblical truths and principles. A framework is more focused than a general Christian worldview and offers a filter to address political concerns.) *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe/unsure
- ○ Prefer not to answer
- ○ Other

15. Depending on how you answered questions 8-9, please briefly explain the biblical and theological concepts and/or framework you use in your political engagement (even if answered "Maybe/unsure").

16. What should faithful Christian participation in politics today look like? *

17. Conversely, what does unfaithful Christian participation in politics today look like? *

18. Are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote for? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation. *

19. Conversely, are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote against? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation. *

20. How do you feel about someone who generally votes politically opposite/different than you? *

21. What do you think of the spiritual state of those who generally vote politically opposite/different than you? *

22. How should Christians behave when addressing political issues and disagreements? *

23. What is your impression and/or understanding of concepts like "human flourishing" and "the common good"? *

24. Is there anything else you would like to add about your faith-based political engagement?

25. Is there any part of the series and class you especially appreciated, disliked, or would recommend changing? Please explain. *

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1/7/2022

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APPENDIX C:

SURVEY DATA

NA/#1 Did you complete the pre-series survey?	
(Matching)	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Yes
Participant 2A	Yes
Participant 3A	Yes
Participant 4A	Yes
Participant 5A	Yes
Participant 6A	Yes
Participant 7A	Yes
Participant 8A	Yes
Participant 9A	Yes
Participant 10A	Yes
Participant 11A	Yes
(Non-Matching)	**Post-Series**
Participant 12C	Yes
Participant 13C*	No (I have completed the informed-consent form.)
Participant 14C	Yes
Participant 15C*	No (I have completed the informed-consent form.)
Participant 16C	Yes
Participant 17C	Yes
*Question 2 on the post-series survey asks participants to provide info to help match surveys.	
**Participant 13C and 15C only completed post-series surveys.	

NA/#3 Number of Faith & Flourishing in Politics sermons I listened to: | NA/#4 Number of Faith & Flourishing in Politics Christian Education classes I participated in/reviewed:		
(Matching)	**Sermons**	**Classes**
Participant 1A	9	6
Participant 2A	10	0
Participant 3A	7	0
Participant 4A	9	0
Participant 5A	10	10
Participant 6A	10	10
Participant 7A	10	8
Participant 8A	9	9
Participant 9A	8	9
Participant 10A	8	8
Participant 11A	9	9
		*All Post-Series
(Non-Matching)		
Participant 12C	9	0
Participant 13C*	10	0
Participant 14C	10	3
Participant 15C*	10	9
Participant 16C	10	9
Participant 17C	9	3

#2/#5 In your experience, how often has your pastor or church addressed politics or political issues?				*Table 1. In your experience, how often has your pastor or church addressed politics or political issues?*				
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**			**Pre-Series**		**Post-Series**	
Participant 1A	Sometimes	Sometimes		**Always (5)**	0	0%	0	0%
Participant 2A	Sometimes	Very Often		**Very Often (4)**	3	16%	2	12%
Participant 3A	Very Often	Sometimes		**Sometimes (3)**	11	58%	12	71%
Participant 4A	Sometimes	Sometimes		**Rarely (2)**	4	21%	3	18%
Participant 5A	Sometimes	Sometimes		**Never (1)**	1	5%	0	0%
Participant 6A	Sometimes	Sometimes		**Total**	19		17	**% Change**
Participant 7A	Sometimes	Sometimes		**Average Score**	2.84		2.94	3.5%
Participant 8A	Sometimes	Sometimes						
Participant 9A	Sometimes	Sometimes						
Participant 10A	Rarely	Rarely						
Participant 11A	Rarely	Rarely						
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**							
Participant 12B	Sometimes							
Participant 13B	Rarely							
Participant 14B	Sometimes							
Participant 15B	Never							
Participant 16B	Very Often							
Participant 17B	Very Often							
Participant 18B	Sometimes							
Participant 19B	Rarely							
		Post-Series						
Participant 12C		Sometimes						
Participant 13C*		Sometimes						
Participant 14C		Rarely						
Participant 15C*		Very Often						
Participant 16C		Sometimes						
Participant 17C		Sometimes						
*The question format of #/# signifies pre-series survey question number, then post-series survey question number.								

#3/#6 How equipped do you feel to address political issues from a biblical perspective?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 2A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 3A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 4A	Very Low	Average
Participant 5A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 6A	Below Average	Average
Participant 7A	Above Average	Average
Participant 8A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 9A	Above Average	Above Average
Participant 10A	Average	Above Average
Participant 11A	Average	Above Average
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Average	
Participant 13B	Average	
Participant 14B	Above Average	
Participant 15B	Average	
Participant 16B	Above Average	
Participant 17B	Above Average	
Participant 18B	Below Average	
Participant 19B	Above Average	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Above Average
Participant 13C*		Average
Participant 14C		Average
Participant 15C*		Above Average
Participant 16C		Above Average
Participant 17C		Above Average

Table 2. How equipped do you feel to address political issues from a biblical perspective?

	Pre-Series		**Post-Series**	
Very High (5)	0	0%	0	0%
Above Average (4)	11	58%	12	71%
Average (3)	5	26%	5	29%
Below Average (2)	2	11%	0	0%
Very Low (1)	1	5%	0	0%
Total	19		17	**% Change**
Average Total Score	3.37		3.71	10.0%
Class Participation	12		3.75	11.3%
6 or More Classes	10		3.80	12.8%
No Class Participation	5		3.60	6.9%

#4/#7 Is it possible to have a mutually respectful and beneficial conversation about faith and politics without causing division within the local church?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Very Probably	Definitely
Participant 2A	Probably	Very Probably
Participant 3A	Definitely	Definitely
Participant 4A	Probably	Very Probably
Participant 5A	Possibly	Very Probably
Participant 6A	Possibly	Probably Not
Participant 7A	Possibly	Possibly
Participant 8A	Probably	Possibly
Participant 9A	Possibly	Possibly
Participant 10A	Probably	Very Probably
Participant 11A	Possibly	Probably
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Definitely	
Participant 13B	Very Probably	
Participant 14B	Definitely	
Participant 15B	Possibly	
Participant 16B	Possibly	
Participant 17B	Probably	
Participant 18B	Very Probably	
Participant 19B	Definitely	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Definitely
Participant 13C*		Very Probably
Participant 14C		Possibly
Participant 15C*		Definitely
Participant 16C		Very Probably
Participant 17C		Probably

Table 3. Is it possible to have a mutually respectful and beneficial conversation about faith and politics without causing division within the local church?

	Pre-Series		*Post-Series*	
Definitely (5)	4	21%	4	24%
Very Probably (4)	3	16%	6	35%
Probably (3)	5	26%	2	12%
Possibly (2)	7	37%	4	24%
Probably Not (1)	0	0%	1	6%
Definitely Not (0)	0	0%	0	**0%**
Total	19		17	% Change
Average Score	3.21		3.47	8.1%

#5/#8 Which political party, if any, are you currently registered with?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 2A	Republican Party	Unchanged
Participant 3A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 4A	Democratic Party	Unchanged
Participant 5A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 6A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 7A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 8A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 9A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
Participant 10A	Republican Party	Unchanged
Participant 11A	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	Unchanged
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 13B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 14B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 15B	Independent	
Participant 16B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 17B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 18B	Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	
Participant 19B	Not registered to vote	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Not registered to vote
Participant 13C*		Not registered to vote
Participant 14C		Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)
Participant 15C*		Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)
Participant 16C		Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)
Participant 17C		Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)

Table 4. Which political party, if any, are you currently registered with?

	Pre-Series		**Post-Series**	
Unenrolled (i.e., Independent)	15	79%	12	71%
Republican Party	2	11%	2	12%
Democratic Party	1	5%	1	6%
Not Registered to Vote	1	5%	2	12%
Total	19		17	

NA/#9 Has anything changed in your thinking as a result of participating in the Faith & Flourishing in Politics sermon series and/or Christian Education class?	
(Matching)	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	No significant changes. However, I can say that my thinking on politics has changed significantly since I started attending Cornerstone.
Participant 2A	Having done a lot of research into faith and politics prior to the sermon series, I do not feel my thinking has changed. I do feel that I was given a new perspective to see certain circumstances from
Participant 3A	Nothing has changed
Participant 4A	Yes. The first sermon Jonathan talked about politics needing to be redeemed. I was cynical about politics, but the series helped me understand politics is broken because the world is broken. So, our politics can be redeemed. Also, the idea that Jesus will make all things new, not all things new.
Participant 5A	Increased already strong belief that the ends do not justify the means, that how we engage is probably more important than how we vote, that God is interested in, and found in, the journey as well as the destination. We need to end divisiveness. Love is needed more than agreement.
Participant 6A	I have become aware through this series that there are Christians that vote differently than me based on their perception of right and wrong and that their positions are biblically based as mine are.
Participant 7A	No.
Participant 8A	I learned that "Christian Nationalism" is a partisan 'club' now used without and within the church against conservative Christians. The American flag, a symbol of unity and submission to God, honored and died for is now a subject used as a 'straw man' to create division among uneducated believers and non-believers.
Participant 9A	Yes, I do feel more confident to engage in politics because I have a better grasp on faithful responses to political engagement.
Participant 10A	Definitely. I think that prior to this series, I was expecting more of a "black and white" decision making guidance from the church and/or the pastorate. Right vs wrong. Now, I realize that it is more of a process. It requires a familiarity with God's word to provide wisdom and to understand how He wants us to treat others, to care for others. And, it requires confidence and conviction in our faith with a courage to listen carefully but to speak truth always being faithful in the big and little moments. One of the phrases that stuck with me is that decisions come from a "heart attitude". Often, I struggle between the head knowledge and the heart feelings. What is practical and "fair" as opposed to what is for the good of others. And the good of others is not always just giving to them or providing what others think they need. Sometimes "helping hurts".
Participant 11A	I was encouraged to approach those with differing opinions with optimism, remembering God's love for them and with the hope that we both will shed light on difficult subjects.
(Non-Matching)	
Participant 12C	Yes, I am not that good when it comes to politics but I have learned how to be a Christian in the world that we live in and in politics
Participant 13C*	Politics is something that was supposed to happen.
Participant 14C	no
Participant 15C*	Yes! I especially loved the Understanding & Wisdom class because of our discussion on the layers between core belief and actual policies. I used to have a more direct line between them, and found it challenging to reconcile different policy positions by Christians.
Participant 16C	realizing that people and issues are often much more nuanced than the extremes that are portrayed. Challenged to think about emphasis and value put on personal freedom in balance of good for others.
Participant 17C	Not in particular.

#6/#10 In your own words, how do you identify yourself politically?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Moderate, leaning conservative	I would say that I tend to be conservative. Although I've become more moderate over the last few years.
Participant 2A	Slightly more right leaning but close to the middle	Right leaning but closer to the middle than the right wing.
Participant 3A	Moderate	Independent
Participant 4A	I'm evolving but honestly not usually too intestinal in politics. I feel both parties don't really change anything and most politicians at the National level are corrupt.	I am more independent. I don't really subscribe to a particular party but registered Democrat since MA is a Democrat state and I'd at least like a say in which candidates represent our state.
Participant 5A	cynical and tired - in favor of smaller government - fiscally conservative - environmentally conscious - compassionate - 25% Republican, 50% Libertarian, 12.5% Democrat, 12.5% Green-Rainbow	Fiscally conservative and split on social issues. Definitely have things I like about each party. Often try to determine the best person to vote for regardless of party - someone with integrity and compassion.
Participant 6A	moderate conservative	Conservative
Participant 7A	Conservative	I believe in following the Bible and the Constitution. I am not affiliated but tend to vote Republican because I believe they are closer to following the Bible and the Constitution than Democrats
Participant 8A	Conservative, family values, constitutionalist.	Conservative, family values, constitutionalist.
Participant 9A	I believe our right to vote in the United States is the backbone of our democracy, so I will always exercise my right to vote. I have leaned both to the right (Republican) and to the left (Democrat). I enjoy politics and the political process, but I am not politically active, per se.	I am interested in politics, but not ardent and/or obsessed.
Participant 10A	conservative	Fiscally and socially conservative.
Participant 11A	Conservative, believe in least possible government, most widely distributed power.	Conservative, believe in least possible government, most widely distributed power.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Conservative	
Participant 13B	moderate	
Participant 14B	Getting more liberal as I age	
Participant 15B	I am a fiscally conservative person who in a perfect world (think Colin Powell as president) would like to be a Republican. However, I am a moderate who now needs to vote for someone who is neither far left or far right. I would vote for a Democratic moderate or a Republican moderate. I value small government, but feel a responsibility for the downtrodden and disadvantaged in our country.	
Participant 16B	Moderate	
Participant 17B	Socially Libertarian, Fiscally Moderate	
Participant 18B	Conservative	
Participant 19B	No, but if asked [redacted] to do something political that would help the fairy grow then I will do it.	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Not very political but can support sides/causes that are important.
Participant 13C*		Out of touch w/ what goes on in the political world.
Participant 14C		conservative
Participant 15C*		Moderate/independent, but somewhat left of center.
Participant 16C		historically conservative, but also wanting good things for others
Participant 17C		Moderate. Believe strongly in both conservative and liberal ideas, selectively.

#7/#11 How do you determine which candidates and policies to vote for/against?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Weigh how they align with my biblical world view.	I try to weigh them in light of my Christian world view and what is in scripture.
Participant 2A	I vote for the candidates/policies that I feel best support and benefit my community	I consider how their policies may impact society and what would be the best course of action to help show God's love to my community
Participant 3A	In the past, it's almost solely been on the abortion issue	I try to first use the Bible, and then my own personal values
Participant 4A	Mostly what their stance is on issues I care about	Based on issues important to me. For example, how will someone address climate change.
Participant 5A	For candidates, I often try to focus on the best person. For policies, I often focus on what does the most good for the most people or what will protect the vulnerable.	
Participant 6A	I vote primarily for pro-life and family values candidates	Though there are both good and bad policies on both sides (Republican/Democrat), I always vote for a pro-life candidate.
Participant 7A	based on Biblical teaching and the US Constitution	How closely their positions line up with what God considers right.
Participant 8A	Based on their actions, views, and words, relative to the 10 Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, Christian view of Biblical principles, views of America's Founding Fathers.	Based on their actions, views, and words, relative to the 10 Commandments, Parables of Jesus, Christian view of Biblical principles, views of America's Founding Fathers.
Participant 9A	I try to view which of our country's (or state, city) issues are most pressing at the moment, and who the best leader will be to take on those challenges.	I typically seek good, strong leaders who essentially advocate for the common good- even if I don't agree with all their political views.
Participant 10A	I look at what the person's statements/promises in light of their past practices. I balance this against the constitutionality of their ideas as well as the ethical and moral values that I hold.	Well now, I will probably plan to engage more in discussion with other believers. This would be in the realm of seeking wisdom but also to verify that I have the right "heart attitude". In considering candidates, it often seems like they promise things which appear to be and probably are impossible. So my habit has been to look at their past history of political actions, try to determine their motivations for behaviors - self vs others and if their actions and words are/have been consistent with a God centered/Biblical based framework whether they profess that or not. I am also leery of "big government" policies. The responsibility that we give to government to care for others, the less responsibility that we ourselves take.
Participant 11A	Vote for person most closely aligned with "small government" constitutional principles. Usually this is the "least awful" candidate, especially in this state.	Vote for person most closely aligned with "small government" constitutional principles. Usually this is the "least awful" candidate, especially in this state.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	There is no party of Christ, so I try to identify key issues and the stances on balance. Some getting more weight than others.	
Participant 13B	research hot-button views, try to compare it to what the Bible says on those topics, and consider the broader party stances as well	
Participant 14B	It's complicated. Do the least harm and the most benefit.	
Participant 15B	I look at what Christ commands Christians to do....our social obligation, our call to help those in need and to right the wrongs in society.	
Participant 16B	Reading a myriad of articles online.	
Participant 17B	Generally utilitarianism.	
Participant 18B	I test the character of the candidate and then test each issue independently people	
Participant 19B	If they have a strong faith	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Their character and how they treat other people and even the other side.
Participant 13C*		If I could vote, it would be by who/what will help the most people.
Participant 14C		Integrity and character is most important. I know that there is no candidate who will check all the boxes for me
Participant 15C*		I try to look at the social impact and the candidates' record, in terms of what helpful/harmful things they've actually done, but sometimes I still just go for whoever I like better (or vote against whomever I don't like).
Participant 16C		Not an easy answer. There is not a perfect candidate or policy - weighing where these things stand in light of what God holds important.
Participant 17C		Comparison of their claimed positions and integrity with my own beliefs and opinions.

#8/#12 What sources have shaped your current political position? (Note: The term "sources" refers to any people, parties, organizations, books, media, or other things that have influenced the way you interact in faith and politics.)		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Listen to sermons. Main stream media.	media, I prefer local news because that seems to be the least influenced by ideologies.
Participant 2A	I have read several books and have had several discussions about faith and politics which is what mainly formed my views	accounts. I have also read several books that pertain to politics from the biblical perspective
Participant 3A	Books, media, and college education	My pastor
Participant 4A	I don't really have a set political position. However, my understanding of issues such as climate change and how we treat the most vunerable. Also, news, books I've read, and discourse with my [spouse] and my [parent].	Conversations with my [spouse] and my [parent], newspapers, reading books.
Participant 5A	Parents, friends, podcasts, radio and TV, Internet. I am not loyal to any one source, but try to look at several sources when I have time to connect. I am often under informed due to time being spent other places/ways.	Certainly my parents, the Bible, my church upbringing, etc., my current family and discussions with loved ones, online articles and research, podcasts like The Holy Post, etc.
Participant 6A	The Bible and Christians whose views I value and respect	In [year] when I became a Christian, a friend made me aware that the Democratic party was pro abortion. So since that time I have voted for pro-life candidates. Even before I became a Christian, I felt in my heart that killing an unborn child was terribly wrong.
Participant 7A	the Bible, Christian radio, various pastors, friends and family. church groups I have belonged to	The Bible, Christian radio preachers.
Participant 8A	Bible, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, Massachusetts Constitution, Materials from National Center for Constitutional Studies, David Barton's Wallbuilder's Ministry, Jack Van Impe Ministries, D. James Kennedy's Truths That Transform Ministry, Federalist Papers and Anti-Federalist Papers, New American Magazine, Talk show hosts-Howie Carr, Jeff Kuhner, and Jesse Kelly, and Christian radio.	Bible, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, Massachusetts Constitution, Materials from National Center for Constitutional Studies, David Barton's Wallbuilder's Ministry, Jack Van Impe Ministries, D. James Kennedy's Truths That Transform Ministry, Federalist Papers and Anti-Federalist Papers, New American Magazine, Talk show hosts-Howie Carr, Jeff Kuhner, and Jesse Kelly, and Christian radio.
Participant 9A	The Bible. I also enjoy the content of the Holy Post podcast.	Podcasts- Holy Post. Chuck Colson.
Participant 10A	Influences include the way I was raised - work ethic, family values (which included regular participation in worship), church and church families, profession as a [type of job] and work experiences in caring for others, interest in and reading in American history.	Much of my position is shaped by the life I have lived, from my upbringing, to the friends of my adulthood, to my professional experiences as well has my church and faith experiences. I read a daily newspaper which covers local politics well. My [redacted] reads a national paper which covers national politics ans we share these information sources as well as those from the radio news and discussions with friends, family and coworkers. I also am familiar with the US Constitution and US history and try to go back to those founding principles when faced with a difficult decision in voting for or supporting a candidate or policy.
Participant 11A	The Bible, world news (newspapers but not TV news), the documented history of "large government / progressive" oppression, persecution, and failures, Reading history, many books and articles. Our Constitution.	The Bible, History, world news (newspapers but not TV news), the documented history of "large government / progressive" oppression, persecution, and failures, Reading history, many books and articles. Our Constitution and the writings of those who crafted it.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	news, podcasts, Bible, discussions	
Participant 13B	The Gospel Coalition, CNN	
Participant 14B	Lived experiences, digging into The Bible more and reckoning with the fact that a lot of evangelical ideology (like anti-socialism) is nowhere in the text. News and stories from all over.	
Participant 15B	I have been disappointed in Evangelical Christians during this past election who have taken a destructive far right position and supported Trump. I follow scientific journals on climate change, read books and articles to stay current on issues. I watch several news sources for a balanced perspective. I have walked away from being an Evangelical Christian b/c I feel the "church" has been misinformed and often have embraced conspiracy theories and a large majority have supported a candidate I feel is the antithesis of what Christians should be supporting.	
Participant 16B	Close personal relationships with moderate individuals, and reliable article sources.	
Participant 17B	Education, books, news media, peers.	
Participant 18B	People and publications that I trust but sure	
Participant 19B	Fox News and other news stations	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		The Mother Teresa speech at the prayer breakfast.
Participant 13C*		My civics class and like my parents and the bible.
Participant 14C		news, interviews, discussions with friends
Participant 15C*		My parents, the Democratic party, Jim Wallis/Sojorners, World Relief, The Economist, The NY Times, working for 10 years in international development, authors like Bryant Myers & Brian Fikkert, social justice studies/a Reading the Bible From the Margins course in undergrad...
Participant 16C		my [parent], previous pastor, Holy Post podcast, this sermon series!, my [spouse], listening to other sides
Participant 17C		College, corporate news media of various sources (including government funded), select books, and podcasts.

#9/#13 What specific biblical or theological concepts shape the way you engage in politics?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Love God and love my neighbor. Respect authority. Obedience to God's commands.	I like to remember that we are all made in the image of God. That each person is a special, precious part of His creation no matter their beliefs or background. I also try to recognize the sovereignty of God and my own humility in light of that.
Participant 2A	I tend to think about what honors Jesus' command to love your neighbors as yourself and tend to support the policies that help or love others	The biggest concept would be loving others as ourselves. We may disagree on the best way to do that, however, if that is at the heart of every Christian as they engage in politics, I believe we can have a discussion without causing division.
Participant 3A	1) Jesus loves everyone 2) I, as a sinner, do not have room to judge others' sins more heavily than my own	Just looking out for others and loving my neighbor
Participant 4A	Not sure really. I do think the clear mandate to care for the most vunerable in society in the Bible shapes my political position.	Before this series, I didn't really see Jesus as engaging much in politics. He said pay your taxes etc, obey the government. However, after the series, I think the Flourish acronym is a great paradigm with which to use to engage.
Participant 5A	Valuing ethics and character in leaders. Remembering God is on the throne no matter the political landscape.	Love for neighbor and the inherent value of all people. Being a good steward of what God has given us personally and as humans.
Participant 6A	How Jesus values life as expressed in his own sacrificial death on the cross to give us eternal life.	The bible speaks in both the old and new testaments of the value of life and the command to not kill. Jesus admonished his own disciples who tried to keep little children from being a bother to him. He welcomed them and gave them value. In Luke it speaks about the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped at the sound of Mary's greeting, illustrating life before birth. Luke being a physician seemed to know about when life began.
Participant 7A	Inerrancy of scripture, Ten Commandments	Commandments, sermon on the mount, the way Jesus acted.
Participant 8A	Thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, dishonor parents. Obey those in government who behave honorably. Forgive as our Lord forgave us. Deal with others in Christian charity, but take courage when facing the enemy. Speak the truth in love. Love as our Lord loves.	Thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, dishonor parents. Obey those in government who behave honorably. Forgive as our Lord forgave us. Deal with others in Christian charity, but take courage when facing the enemy. Speak the truth in love. Love as our Lord loves.
Participant 9A	Love your neighbor as yourself. Valuing God's creation- both human life and the world around us. Being good stewards of His creation. Caring for the poor, the downtrodden. Welcoming the aliens- those from other lands.	We are all made in the image of God, so that even people who disagree with me are valuable. Moreso, there is usually some good for what others , who have different opinions than me, are advocating.
Participant 10A	Ten commandments, commandments to love God and others, general themes of responsibility to care for others and to obey authorities (allowed to have power by God), but always guided by being in the word and in prayer.	So many places in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, speak to our responsibility to care for those less fortunate than ourselves. So that is always in the back of my mind. So the commandments to love God (first) with all our heart, soul and mind and (second) our neighbor as ourselves. After this class I would add a focus on where our allegiance should lie. That Jesus puts this into focus with His admonition to render to Caesar the things of this world and to God our very selves. He "right sizes" human authority.
Participant 11A	While we are to obey earthly authorities, and the Bible says clearly that He wants us to be "model citizens", only God is sovereign. God wants us to choose, as individuals, to love Him. We are also commanded, also individually, to love our neighbors. This does not mean that we are to make their decisions for them. While we ARE commanded to "care for the least of these", we are not commanded to use force to take from others to support such works. While I do support the provision by government of a "safety net" for those unable to care for themselves, WE are also individually to do so. Note also the Bible's many affirmations that the God wishes that all who can work, do so. Finally, I believe that only God can create paradise, we cannot. The evidence is clear that all past attempts to do so by using power of others (government) have ended horribly. Therefore it is also clear that progressives, socialists and all other "central planners" base their philosophy on a secular lie.	This answer is the same as the answer I gave in the prior survey. While we are to obey earthly authorities, and the Bible says clearly that He wants us to be "model citizens", only God is sovereign. God wants us to choose, as individuals, to love Him. We are also commanded, also individually, to love our neighbors. This does not mean that we are to make their decisions for them. While we ARE commanded to "care for the least of these", we are not commanded to use force to take from others to support such works. While I do support the provision by government of a "safety net" for those unable to care for themselves, WE are also individually to do so. Note also the Bible's many affirmations that the God wishes that all who can work, do so. Finally, I believe that only God can create paradise, we cannot. The evidence is clear that all past attempts to do so by using power of others (government) have ended horribly. Therefore it is also clear that progressives, socialists and all other "central planners" base their philosophy on a secular lie.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	all being made in the image of God, loving others, good stewardship of resources	
Participant 13B	Trying to love our neighbors while not endorsing/enabling policies that go against Biblical teaching	
Participant 14B	Love your neighbors, seek justice and prosperity for your country	
Participant 15B	I look at Scripture to determine what my obligation is in society. I campaign for and vote for candidates who align most closely to those views. I feel strongly about racism in any way shape or form. Scripture teaches me all people are created in God's image and should be treated with equal respect and opportunity. I have an obligation, as does the church, to act locally in providing aid to those in need.	
Participant 16B	Justice, love, and mercy.	
Participant 17B	Justice and compassion.	
Participant 18B	Not sure	
Participant 19B	Idk	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		The idea that God is on his own side and you are to speak prophetically.
Participant 13C*		Love your neighbor as yourself, the fruit of the spirit.
Participant 14C		respect for life and God's creation. Grace
Participant 15C*		Justice, shalom, Matthew 25/the importance of caring for the poor & vulnerable & exploited.
Participant 16C		being made in the image of God, love of neighbor, trying to bridge the broken present with a perfect future
Participant 17C		The social teachings of Jesus regarding the treatment of society's most vulnerable.

#10/#14 Do you have a biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics? (Note: A theological framework is a lens, grid, or paradigm to analyze a particular issue, like politics using Biblical truths and principles. A framework is more focused than a general Christian worldview and offers a filter to address political concerns.)		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	No	Maybe/unsure
Participant 2A	Maybe/unsure	Yes
Participant 3A	Yes	Yes
Participant 4A	Maybe/unsure	Maybe/unsure
Participant 5A	Maybe/unsure	Yes
Participant 6A	Yes	Yes
Participant 7A	Yes	Maybe/unsure
Participant 8A	Yes	Yes
Participant 9A	Maybe/unsure	Yes
Participant 10A	Maybe/unsure	I would have said no earlier, but the FLOURISH framework presented in this class will be a starting place for me going forward.
Participant 11A	Maybe/unsure	Yes
		*I classified 10A's post-series answer as "Maybe to Yes."
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Maybe/unsure	
Participant 13B	Maybe/unsure	
Participant 14B	Maybe/unsure	
Participant 15B	Maybe/unsure	
Participant 16B	Maybe/unsure	
Participant 17B	No	
Participant 18B	No	
Participant 19B	Maybe/unsure	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Maybe/unsure
Participant 13C*		Maybe/unsure
Participant 14C		Maybe/unsure
Participant 15C*		Maybe/unsure
Participant 16C		Yes
Participant 17C		No

Table 5. Do you have a biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics?

	Pre-Series		Post-Series		
Yes (3)	4	21%	9	53%	
Maybe/unsure (2)	12	63%	7	41%	
No (1)	3	16%	1	6%	
Total	19		17	% Change	
Average Score	2.05		2.47	20.5%	
Class Participation	NA		2.50	22.0%	
6 or More Classes	NA		2.70	31.7%	
No Class Participation	NA		2.40	17.1%	

Table 6. Change in biblical and/or theological framework for engaging in faith and politics.

	Answers	**Percentage**
No to Maybe (+)	1	9%
Maybe to Maybe (0)	1	9%
Yes to Maybe (-)	1	9%
Maybe to Yes (+)	5	45%
Yes to Yes (0)	3	27%
Total	**11**	

#11/#15 Depending on how you answered questions 8-9, please briefly explain the biblical and theological concepts and/or framework you use in your political engagement (even if answered "Maybe/unsure").		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A		I assume that should read questions 13-14. I think my answer to this is the same as question 13. I also try to remember the truths in the book of James. I want to listen before responding or acting. Not immediately jump to conclusions.
Participant 2A		Following what was discussed in the sermon series, I now try to view things from other perspectives than just my own. I strive to understand other points of view. But above all I focus on caring for others as the main framework for how I will engage in the future
Participant 3A		Loving others. Treating everyone with dignity and respect, whether or not they're Americans. Not treating the US as any special country
Participant 4A	I don't think I can articulate. I don't see Jesus really getting involved in politics. He said "Give to Caesar what is his.." so I think Christians ought to not get too distracted by politics since it won't really solve the problems in our society.	
Participant 5A	I am not certain there is a Biblical answer for many of the political questions of our day. It is complicated and no candidate or policy or political party follows biblical principles completely. Often we only have two bad choices and we need to figure out which is less bad. It is a no win situation most of the time and people need to pick hot button issues and often become one or two issue voters.	Evaluate everything against the truths of Scripture. Engage thoughtfully and prayerfully. Recognize no one party has claim to God's truth or ways.
Participant 6A	God created mankind in the form of male and female to be fruitful and multiply. His plan was clear and specific. Also, Psalm 139:14-15 clearly sates that God knows us as persons in our mother's wombs.	In political engagement with those who disagree with me I emphatically point out that abortion is killing a person, and it doesn't matter that the world wants it and politicians cater to the whims of the world. The bible is my standard of what is right or wrong, not the opinion of the world.
Participant 7A	Inerrancy of scripture, Ten Commandments (same as question 9)	Commandments, sermon on the mount, the way Jesus acted
Participant 8A	Thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, dishonor parents. Obey those in government who behave honorably. Forgive as our Lord forgave us. Deal with others in Christian charity, but take courage when facing the enemy. Speak the truth in love. Love as our Lord loves.	Thou shalt not murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, dishonor parents. Obey those in government who behave honorably. Forgive as our Lord forgave us. Deal with others in Christian charity, but take courage when facing the enemy. Speak the truth in love. Love as our Lord loves.
Participant 9A	I believe life is complex and there are sometimes many sides to an issue. While it would be great to say that is bad, and this is good, the issues are often more complex than that. Same with our elected leaders. I think people on both sides of the political spectrum have good intention (in the best case scenario), and I do think it is a worthwhile goal to foster genuine discussion and debate on how we see the world the same and differently. Hopefully through such engagement the desire is to meet in the middle to work towards solutions.	We should love our neighbor, respect that they are made in the image of God, and do our best to keep in mind the common good when we are in the political process.
Participant 10A		First would be a responsibility to prayerfully consider the issue(s) recognizing that there are some absolute truths which are often overlooked "for the good of others". A big lesson from the OT is what happened when the people asked God for a king instead of relying upon Him. I am careful not to pledge allegiance to a particular party and especially to not look to government for all of the solutions to every social problem.
Participant 11A	Again, it is clear that God wishes us to be good citizens. This does not mean that we are to encourage the growth of centralized power in government. Small government, small amounts of power over others, is consistent with my belief of how our God wishes Christians to be "in the world, but not of the world". We are to act individually, to encourage useful work, and to care for those not able to care for themselves. That is, individually, not corporately. All past experiments with powerful, centralized authoritative governments have ended in very un-Godly, very anti-Christian disasters. We do not need to learn this lesson over and over and over. This evil is to be opposed.	God gave us both free will and a commandment to love Him and our neighbors. Clearly he wants us to choose to care "for the least of these". He does not command us to force others to do this, which the imposition of re-distributive taxes (by force) does. Evil means cannot serve Godly ends. History is clear that we humans are not able to wield significant power over others without it leading to corruption and oppression, we cannot create "a perfect society" here, only the second coming can do that. We should be wary of those who believe otherwise. Their pursuit of "good intentions" always ends in blood and suffering.
		*Left blank if no answer.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	How do certain choices reflect on all being made in the image of God, loving others, good stewardship of resources	
Participant 13B		
Participant 14B	Biblical perspective - not just proof texts but heart attitudes	
Participant 15B		
Participant 16B	I often try to make the point of acting for the good of others when engaging people who only want to think of themselves and how they're impacted.	
Participant 17B	Teachings of Jesus pertaining to how we treat the less fortunate members of society, and further what our society should prioritize.	
Participant 18B		
Participant 19B	How Jesus talks and how people respond	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		The idea that God is on his own side is basically he is not republican or Democrat neither any other parties. The idea of Speaking Prophetically is speaking boldly and powerfully but truthfully and in a good sense.
Participant 13C*		Like just do the whole "what would Jesus do?" thing and then double-check scriptures to make sure that's actually what Jesus would do.
Participant 14C		Do you mean questions 13-14? See my answer in 13.
Participant 15C*		I have tended to see political participation as a vehicle for ushering in aspects of God's kingdom (particularly the here and now aspects of it, like justice and shalom and how people relate to and treat one another). Jim Wallis/Sojourners really shaped this thinking early in my adult life. Caring for neighbor in tangible, economic, and systemic ways are paramount.
Participant 16C		I think FLOURISH is a great approach
Participant 17C		No formal framework. Generally allow my social views to be primarily influenced by Jesus's teachings on how society's most vulnerable should be treated.

#12/#16 What should faithful Christian participation in politics today look like?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Respectfully champion causes that are consistent with biblical truth. Vote along those lines.	I like the idea of grace and truth. That we hold firmly to the truths of scripture, but present those truths with humility and compassion.
Participant 2A	Christians should choose to support policies that their faith would support; however, it is important to keep in mind that the United States is not God's chosen poeple	Christians should not be quick to back a particular candidate or policy. Even though some policies may seem obviously Christian to some, they might not be to others. Instead, we should take our time and research how some policies may have effects we did not consider which could change our stance
Participant 3A	I think Christians should be open minded. We should be able to discern what theological concepts should be reflected in lawmaking and not so as to avoid a forced theocracy	Being careful about bipartisanship. We should follow the Bible before our party.
Participant 4A	Vote, do whatever their conscience tells them. But Church should not be focused on backing a political agenda.	No matter what your political party or how you land on a particular side of an issue, Christians should be gentle, respectful, and consider others first.
Participant 5A	Thoughtful and prayerful participation. Civil and constructive discourse. Living like Jesus regardless of the politics.	Jesus above self, Jesus above party, Jesus above country. The fruit of the Spirit.
Participant 6A	Study to know what the policies are, ask God for wisdom to make the right choices of candidates based on their political stand on the policies.	I think a Christian's involvement should be with sincerity of heart and conscience and not to try to win but to have the greater good of our world and nation in mind. A politician who is a Christian should consider all the bible has to say about the issues and not choose one good over another. It's almost impossible in the current political climate of our nation.
Participant 7A	Voting, calling Senators and representatives about certain issues to ask them to support various pieces of legislation that are biblical and oppose legislation that isn't biblical, speaking kindly to people with opposing views but still speaking the truth (speaking the truth in love), it could involve running for office.	Standing up for what is right in a kind way. Speaking the truth in love. Remaining engaged in politics while not letting politics take over your whole life.
Participant 8A	Polite, truthful, knowledgeable ,factual, stern when necessary, active, serious, faith-building where possible, persistent, patient, demonstrate faith and love.	Polite, truthful, knowledgeable, factual, stern when necessary, active, serious, faith-building where possible, persistent, patient, demonstrate faith and love.
Participant 9A	Probably more listening than talking. Being peacemakers.	Loving our neighbor!!
Participant 10A	Christians should actively participate in the political process through educating themselves about the issues, being aware of government policies and engaging in discussion within their circles of family, friends, coworkers - their frontlines. And, they should vote!	It should involve acting justly (or supporting justice), loving mercy, and walking humbly. It means taking the responsibility to serve others, not giving that responsibility to someone else. It also means not compromising and boldly sharing what one believes is right.
Participant 11A	We should encourage less spending, less power in government, more individual responsibility, a more clear and capable safety net with less abuse of its intent. We should provide strong opposition to the imposition of secular ethics and corporate decision-making by government. We should also insist that laws be uniformly enforced on all.	We should encourage less spending, less power in government, more individual responsibility, a more clear and capable safety net with less abuse of its intent. We should provide strong opposition to the imposition of secular ethics and corporate decision-making by government. We should also insist that laws be uniformly enforced on all. We are to be "model citizens", which means we must absolutely support the even enforcement of the rule of law.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	conviction with civility, listening posture,	
Participant 13B	Thoughtful but polite discussion, less focus on us v them, ability to disagree	
Participant 14B	Thoughtful and graceful	
Participant 15B	A Christian should be informed and possibly even candidate (I did) for men/women who most closely align with the values held in Scripture.	
Participant 16B	Voting based on solid information.	
Participant 17B	First informing yourself about the facts, and then applying your Christian worldview to those facts. Not ignoring facts for the sake of your Christian worldview.	
Participant 18B	People should be kind and respectful of other's viewpoints even if they disagree	
Participant 19B	To be political of want to but keep in mind what Jesus would do	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Faithful Christian participation in politics should look like they are resembling God when they are in they are in politics.
Participant 13C*		Be kind, not mad ig and try ur best to look at the opposing views, and also what's best for like everyone.
Participant 14C		respectful, listening to others' perspectives and ideas and respectfully agreeing or disagreeing. Again, extending grace.
Participant 15C*		Treating everyone, especially political enemies, with respect and dignity. Elevating the concerns/needs of those on the outside or cast aside. Pointing to the true kingdom and our true hope, while also seeking to bring good order & beauty here and now.
Participant 16C		Being engaged, listening, giving the benefit of doubt, praying, speaking up when appropriate and doing so respectfully, trusting God to work through the mess
Participant 17C		Faith without works is dead. Politics without works is dead. Stop saying, and start doing. Persistent words of hate and sewing division on social media is not politics, but it is political. Christians should be far above that and concerning themselves with the needs of the most disadvantaged.

#13/#17 Conversely, what does unfaithful Christian participation in politics today look like?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Respond out of anger or hate rather than love. Form opinions apart from or misusing scripture.	There are different ways this can look. One danger is conflating political parties or ideologies with Christian faith. Either thinking one political party/organization represents God or that another is evil. Another would be compromising biblical truth especially for selfish reasons.
Participant 2A	Unfaithful Christian participation could look like supporting policies that actively hurt those around or just generally go against Jesus' attitude towards others.	Backing a certain political party or candidate regardless of what they say or do. Even though some of their policies may align with Christian perspectives, they good may not outweigh the harm they cause to some or even sully the Christian name.
Participant 3A	We shouldn't necessarily follow trends of past generations of Christians just because they're "Christian views"	Worshipping our country over our God.
Participant 4A	Go to Facebook and you'll see it. Name calling, hateful comments, lack of real dialogue and curiosity to understand another position other than your own.	It's hateful, divisive, disrespectful, all about self and "my rights"
Participant 5A	Hating, demonizing, violence,	Hate, Strife, Anger, Envy, Rage, Bitterness , etc. Party above Jesus, Country above Jesus.
Participant 6A	Not studying the policies or the political candidates' views. Being indifferent, not caring, Thinking there's nothing you can do to change the course the world is taking.	Not caring about it at all because a Christian influence is important.
Participant 7A	Screaming at or saying cruel things to people with opposing views, choosing not to vote, not speaking the truth in love when it needs to be spoken (either not speaking up about issues or speaking up in a mean way)	Calling names, yelling, identifying other people as all good or all bad,
Participant 8A	Mean spirited, vicious, deceitful, self-deceiving, arrogant, covetous.	Mean spirited, vicious, deceitful, self-deceiving, arrogant, covetous.
Participant 9A	People who are divisive, stir the pot, and hold so closely to a given position that they lose the humanity of the person/people on the other side.	Promoting dissension, quarreling, mud-slinging, name-calling Also, the attitude or belief that the ends justifies the means- we need to pass XYZ legislation at all costs.
Participant 10A	Not being informed. Not engaging in discussion which supports Christian/Biblical values. Not voting. In short - not participating in the process.	I would say that it probably substitutes the appearance of doing good without actually considering what is consistent with Biblical teaching. It may involve compromising some principles because "the end justifies the means."
Participant 11A	Deficit spending when not in an existential crisis (war) is theft from future citizens. They will be taxed without having been represented. Attempts to regulate the ethics of others, beyond basic, twelve-commandment style rules, are the "road to hell" paved with (busy-body) "good intentions". The increase of central power, beyond a very limited point, builds the tools of oppressive evil. I think Progressives make Satan smile.	The secular trend to raise the rule of the mob over the rule of law (i.e. "democracy" in the sense of the french revolution) is a seductive appeal to something that seems "good" but is in fact a slippery slope to evil. Deficit spending when not in an existential crisis (war) is theft from future citizens. They will be taxed without having been represented. Attempts to regulate the ethics of others, beyond basic, twelve-commandment style rules, are the "road to hell" paved with (busy-body) "good intentions". The increase of central power, beyond a very limited point, builds the tools of oppressive evil. I think Progressives make Satan smile.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	what's best for me, not listening,	
Participant 13B	Divisive, aggressive	
Participant 14B	Hostile, imposing Christianity/vaues on all through law, siding with popular speakers rather than thoughtfully considering and praying	
Participant 15B	Being uniformed, lacking an open mind, not seeking what Christ would have us do to sift and sort out the hard issues.	
Participant 16B	Christians who abstain from voting.	
Participant 17B	Claiming Jesus would have been in alignment with your political party.	
Participant 18B	Arguing, sniping, not acknowledging that others views may also be valid	
Participant 19B	Arguing,fighting, sometimes death.	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Unfaithful Christian participation in politics looks like that people are yelling, fighting and they think there ideas are better than others.
Participant 13C*		"You said that Mitch McConnel is annoying and I took that personally." countered by "Well you said Bernie Sanders has bad taste in Mittens so I took that personally." and third party intervenes with "None of this would have happened if Kanye West won the election."
Participant 14C		Angry, violent, disrespectful, unbending
Participant 15C*		Villianizing opponents, being influenced primarily by fear (whether it's a loss of freedom, protections, or way of life), elevating the government/politicians to the level of savior.
Participant 16C		generalizing others, assuming the worst, not listening, winning at all costs/ends justify the means,
Participant 17C		Nationalism.

#14/#18 Are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote for? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation.		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	I can't think of an example of something or someone that a Christian should clearly vote for.	I think Christians need to stand for truth, but I think it's risky to say always vote in a certain way for the reasons I stated in the previous question.
Participant 2A	I don't think there are any clear policies that line up 100% with the Bible. It is important for Christians to focus more on how the policies work towards or against the goal of loving others.	I don't think so. There are certainly some that many would agree on, but I think you could disagree and still be a faithful Christian
Participant 3A	I believe that Christians should vote for the preservation of human rights (generally speaking).	I don't think there's specific things we should vote for. Christians should start with the Bible to come up with their own convictions. I do believe that most Christians should align with the same opinions on things like abortion and caring for the needy.
Participant 4A	No. I think it's personal choice according to one's conscience. There are faithful Christian's in both parties.	No.
Participant 5A	No, I don't think so. Maybe protecting the vulnerable among us.	No.
Participant 6A	A Christian should always vote for pro-life and pro-family values issues.	Considering all the issues and that there are good issues to consider on both sides, I believe Christian should always vote to try to end the legalization of abortion. We can't all make the offer Mother Theresa made.
Participant 7A	Faithful heterosexual marriage; intact families; strong loving family relationships; protection of human life; living peacefully with one another;; promotion of voluntary selflessness, good deeds, care of people in need. I believe these are biblical values. They should be taught in church. The more people who learn them, the better off we will be.	Marriage between a man and a woman, honesty, strong families.
Participant 8A	Life, self defense, capitalism tempered by 10 commandments, traditional family values, strong military, best Christian candidate..	Life, self-defense, capitalism tempered by 10 commandments, traditional family values, strong military, best Christian candidate.
Participant 9A	I used to think limiting abortion, and I still do feel strongly for limiting it. But I also realized in this last election cycle that I couldn't focus so much on that while ignoring another whole set of issues that were of importance.	No- but we should be advocates for the sanctity of life.
Participant 10A	Always is a dangerous word. I am not sure that I can always be sure that I understand all aspects of every issue. For instance, I do not believe in "always" voting for Republican or voting against Democratic candidates orpolicies.	Always is a dangerous word and typically engenders a "no" answer. Although I am registered as a Republican, I do not always vote with that party. And, I am not loyal to a politician or policy "until death do us part" but carefully follow the voting record of those I have supported and as/if they become corrupted by power and position, I will remove my support.
Participant 11A	Support the rule of law, Stop allowing government "entitlement" growth. We should attempt to live in peace with our global neighbors, however, surrendering to evil regimes will not foster Gods work here on earth. As has been proven over and over, the best way to have peace is to prepare for war. I do NOT wish our country to have to engage in violence, but bullies, whether in the school-yard of the international community, do not respond nicely to weakness. We must defend this best example, so far, of Christian governance.	Support the rule of law, Stop allowing government "entitlement" growth. We should attempt to live in peace with our global neighbors, however, surrendering to evil regimes will not foster Gods work here on earth. As has been proven over and over, the best way to have peace is to prepare for war. I do NOT wish our country to have to engage in violence, but bullies, whether in the school-yard of the international community, do not respond nicely to weakness. We must defend this best example, so far, of Christian governance. Resist the temptation to borrow money from future citizens (our children and grandchildren) with unnecessary deficit spending.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	i don't know	
Participant 13B	Not sure, but should vote in favor of greater good when possible, so long as not going against Biblical teaching	
Participant 14B	No. The world is too grey to make always statements. (E.g. Typical evangelical approaches to abortion don't seem to actual reduce the amount of tragic circumstances)	
Participant 15B	There was a time when I thought so, but I no longer do. Example: Abortion. I personally do not approve, but we can no longer be one issue voters. Abortions will continue (just as they did in Old Testament times and before) whether legal or not. I believe the ship has sailed on this issue. There are other issues that must all be weighed.	
Participant 16B	Would need context of issues.	
Participant 17B	No.	
Participant 18B	No	
Participant 19B	No	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Yes, I mean You can choose either side in politics as long as you are sharing and showing God to the other side and your side as well. If there topics about about Satan then be very cautious in what you say and always stick up to Jesus.
Participant 13C*		Any policies reducing the amount of the U.S.'s greenhouse gas emissions, and plastic production because I would like my kids to be able to go outside. A bill that changes the United States of America's name to either just The United States or just America because our name is too long now.
Participant 14C		no, vote your conscience. Sometimes there may be a candidate who may take the right stance on one issue but not on another. You have to weigh which would take priority.
Participant 15C*		No! There's too much nuance and context needed to draw a hard line in the sand about that.
Participant 16C		fewer and fewer - free expression of faith
Participant 17C		No. Oversimplification of complex matters to the point of an absolute position is foolish.

#15/#19 Conversely, are there specific policies, positions, political parties, or other things Christians should always vote against? If yes, please list those things with a brief explanation.		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Policies that are clearly contrary to scripture, but this isn't often the case. Abortion comes to mind, but what about a candidate that is pro-abortion?	In general, Christians should vote against a policy that is contrary to biblical truth.
Participant 2A	Again, as stated above, I don't feel there are any specific policies that 100% line up with the Bible.	Pretty similar answer as the previous question.
Participant 3A	Christians should shy away from overly-nationalistic ideology. Based on my evaluation of political parties and what I've studied in the Bible, I don't think we should be to far on either side of the political spectrum. Christians should not determine their views based on a political party, rather, they should take things issue by issue.	Abortion
Participant 4A	No. For the same reasons as above.	No. I don't believe there is. Even the abortion issue.
Participant 5A	Laws that would cause unfair or undue harm to a group of people for no reason - any genocide of course.	No
Participant 6A	A Christian should always vote against a woman's right to choose abortion.	Abortion. It's the killing of a person in the womb where it should be most safe, but it is now most vulnerable and subject to the whim of a woman's right to choose.
Participant 7A	Abortion- the Bible says God knit us together in our mother's womb, so it is bad to kill God's creation. Homosexual marriage- God has put man and woman together and says homosexuality is an abomination, so we should not pass laws to support it. The same would apply to passing laws promoting things that God says are wrong, such as worship of false gods, murder, adultery, stealing, lying. Euthanasia or suicide, as the Bible says that God has numbered our days. Rape, having sex with animals or children, abuse, violence….the list could go on and on. Basically, don't pass laws promoting what God says is wrong.	Murder, rape, pedophilia, abortion, suicide, things that harm other people, anything that is considered wrong in God's eyes.
Participant 8A	Abortion, communism/cultural Marxism in education, government, churches, media, military, and entertainment. CRT	Abortion, communism/cultural Marxism in education, government, churches, media, military, and entertainment. CRT.
Participant 9A	I can't think of any.	No
Participant 10A	As above.	As above, always is a dangerous word and typically engenders a "no" answer. However, in general, I am "always" cautious when political movements or policies are shaped to create even greater consolidation of power among a small group of persons.
Participant 11A	The Democrat party has long been the party of slavery, oppression, Jim-Crow and busy-body manipulation of politics. It fosters disunion as a tool to solidify it's power. It has now been taken over by Progressives, Socialists, Marxists and totalitarians. Many Republicans are not much better, but we are usually reduced to supporting the least awful of the bad choices. Although even a Democrat cannot be wrong 100% of the time, that is a usually safe bet.	he Democrat party has long been the party of slavery, oppression, Jim-Crow and busy-body manipulation of politics. It fosters disunion as a tool to solidify it's power. It has now been taken over by Progressives, Socialists, Marxists and totalitarians. Many Republicans are not much better, but we are usually reduced to supporting the least awful of the bad choices. Although even a Democrat cannot be wrong 100% of the time, that is a usually safe bet. Christians should not support the imposition of majority will upon other lawful citizens.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	pro-choice	
Participant 13B	Policies not aligned with traditionally held (ie. abortion, same sex marriage, etc)	
Participant 14B	No. See above.	
Participant 15B	Christians should vote against anything that is specifically forbidden in Scripture when at all possible. However, all issues need to be weighed and looked at. Whether we vote to make abortions illegal or not is a moot point if our world and climate makes it uninhabitable for our population in 40 or 50 years. If we don't have a sustainable earth, if we are not stewards of God's creation, continue moving towards destruction, other issues will no longer matter. matter.	
Participant 16B	Would need context of issues.	
Participant 17B	No.	
Participant 18B	No	
Participant 19B	Yes, people should stay away from people who don't do things God would like.	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Yes if it involves topics about Satan you just need to be every little bit of cautious about what you say.
Participant 13C*		This may be a bit *controversial* but laws like the Texas abortion one because though abortion is very wrong, making laws restricting it does more harm than good. For example, drugs are illegal but people will still find ways to get them it is just less safe. So for this reason, restricting abortion and making abortion clinics illegal will just cause women to have to resort to an unsafe way to get an abortion. Though as Christians we believe that abortion is wrong, we also have to understand that not everybody shares the same view on the subject as us, so then our job should be to make it safe and make sure the mother will not have any health complications from it. or not idk I'm [redacted] I'm just saying.
Participant 14C		no, same reasons as above
Participant 15C*		Same answer as before: No! There's too much nuance and context needed to draw a hard line in the sand about that.
Participant 16C		While I don't think I could vote for abortion, i also realizing that voting against is only part of the answer. Loving those that are considering that choice needs to be part of the equation.
Participant 17C		No. Oversimplification of complex matters to the point of an absolute position is foolish.

#16/#20 How do you feel about someone who generally votes politically opposite/different than you?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	I can love and respect that person. I'd like to understand their perspective. My feelings may be different if the person is belligerent (passionate?) about their view.	I try to have love and compassion and understanding.
Participant 2A	I disagree with their opinion or reasons why they choose to vote that way, however, I would not argue that is against the Bible to vote differently than me	That is within their right. I would be open to discussing with them why they vote the way they do and maybe even learn something.
Participant 3A	I am very open to those with differing political views.	I don't hold anything against them
Participant 4A	Doesn't bother me	It depends on how they treat me. I respect other people's opinions but if they are disrespectful of my opinion then it's hard to interact with that person
Participant 5A	Fine. No concerns.	Their voting doesn't come to bear on how I feel about them. I may like or dislike them based on other things. I always try to love them. I do not take politics personally.
Participant 6A	I feel sad if they are Christian and vote pro-choice.	It depends on the person and where they are coming from. I am learning to try to understand another's persons reasons and not judge them, especially if they are Christians. I never expect a non-Christian to agree with me.
Participant 7A	How I feel about someone would depend on the particular person. I can't make a generalization based solely on them voting opposite/differently than me.	This would depend on the individual regardless of their political party.
Participant 8A	Can tolerate, with patience and prayer, those who disagree peaceably. Vicious enemies must be confronted, and prayed for.	Can tolerate, with patience and prayer, those who disagree peaceably. Vicious enemies must be confronted, and prayed for.
Participant 9A	I am sure that they have (hopefully) good reasons- for the good of our country- for voting the way they do.	i think that is to be expected- and we are to love our neighbor and treat them as a person made in God's image.
Participant 10A	It depends upon the issue. I sometimes think that I haven't walked in their shoes so I can't know their life experiences that cause them to vote this way. I wonder about their world view and I am concerned for our future.	I often cannot fathom why they think the way they do. I wonder where are they getting their information. Are they truly informed or just voting a part line or a socially correct policy du jour. Or do they know something that I do not know.
Participant 11A	I find it best to try to assume they are attempting to strengthen good and oppose evil, that we just disagree on the best way to do that. The history of strong central government often seems a weak argument when someone is intent that "the government should DO something about …" an issue. I find it often the case that their benevolent intent is pushing us farther down a slippery slope toward authoritarian government. It sometimes helps to shift the focus to the longer-term effects of this well meant imposition of central authority. It seems that many Americans believe that our peaceful freedoms are the way the world would be if we just offered everyone else a hug. I get scared that we, with the best of intentions, are about to start a slide back into darkness.	I try to act and speak as though most other citizens are trying to "do the right thing". However, I do find that those who vote for left-leaning policies have a very shallow knowledge of history, or have had their view of history warped. However much I am commanded to love God's other children, that does not mean I am to tolerate such ignorance as it slowly leads to evil here on earth. We are to resist satan and his works. Progressive policies are clearly of this nature and therefore Christians should resist them.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	they're entitled to a choice and I realize many come from many different perspectives to vote a certain way	
Participant 13B	We can agree to disagree on political views	
Participant 14B	All are entitled o their own opinions.	
Participant 15B	Until the past couple elections, willing to respectfully engage in conversations. Recently, I feel that they are misinformed and a conversation would end in too much hostility.	
Participant 16B	If someone has a strong case for an opposing opinion I can respect that than someone acting solely upon their feelings.	
Participant 17B	Generally perfectly fine. I care more about their process than their conclusion.	
Participant 18B	I respect their opinions but generally try to avoid political conversations with them I think they	
Participant 19B	Ok	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		I feel fine as long as they have a good argument for what they believe. If it is about Satan maybe step away from conversation unless if you stand up to Jesus.
Participant 13C*		if that's how they wanna vote then go ahead because nobody gets a ballad and is thinking "I'm going to vote for the thing that is the worst for our country" we all want what's best, and even though I literally know everything so they're wrong because I am the actual definition of intelligence, they still have good intentions. But honestly, [redacted] so that was all a lie, [redacted] statement was true.
Participant 14C		that is their right. I have many friends on both sides of issues. I still love them.
Participant 15C*		More kindly than I used to! But it's still hard. I generally feel like it's going to be really hard to find common ground.
Participant 16C		realize not everyone is perfect ;) - initially try to think they're approaching with good intentions. I need to start to seek to hear more from their perspective/thinking.
Participant 17C		It depends entirely on what I believe their motivation for holding that belief is. Increasingly it is hate-based, and I have an utter lack of respect for those individuals.

#17/#21 What do you think of the spiritual state of those who generally vote politically opposite/different than you?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	I can not judge a person's spiritual state by their voting.	I try not to draw any conclusions about a person's spiritual state based on their political views. Certainly not that alone. I know all need to hear the truth of the Gospel.
Participant 2A	I would think some of them are faithful Christians and some are not. I would argue the same for people who vote the same way I do. There are some who are faithful and some who are not.	I don't think one's spiritual state could be determined purely based on the way they vote.
Participant 3A	I don't think that the way people vote determines whether or not they're a Christian. Sometimes it depends on the reasons why they vote one way or another.	They can still be Christians
Participant 4A	I think they are just as spiritual or faithful as me	I'm don't know
Participant 5A	If they are Christians, that's good. If they are non-Christians, then I am concerned for their soul.	No correlation.
Participant 6A	Sadly I think they are worldly.	The temptation is to think they are not spiritually minded, but I do realize that they are accountable to God and not to me. I can't judge their heart, only God can do that.
Participant 7A	If someone generally votes politically opposite/different than me on biblical issues, then one of us is probably not in a very good spiritual state. I hope it's not me. I hope it's them.	For clear right or wrong issues, one of us is misunderstanding or not following the Bible, and I hope it is them and not me. For things that aren't clearly good or bad, they just have a different opinion on how the government should be run.
Participant 8A	They are blinded, deceived, and/or self-deceived.	They are blinded, deceived, and/or self-deceived.
Participant 9A	I don't assume their spiritual state based on how they vote.	Same as answer above.
Participant 10A	Again, it depends upon the issue. I am concerned at the sometimes obvious personal "separation of church and state". I worry that some pick and choose what truths they choose to live by or advocate for. I am aware that many situations are similar to those we see in the Old Testament societies over and over again.	I wonder what are their motivations, where are they getting their information, what are the principles from which they make their decisions, what are their intentions?
Participant 11A	There does not seem to be a consistent rule regarding the "spiritual state" of my political opposites. I have found both atheists and Christians of strong faith on strangely similar sides of political issues. It would be easy to (mis) characterize such as "progressive-atheists", but that not my experience. I do think that the path different people take to such mistaken beliefs also differs widely. Atheists tend to use secular-progressive reasoning to conclude that "government can make us better" while strong Christians seem to interpret Gods command to love one another and His imprecation to not judge one another as combining to call for completely accepting all behavior uncritically. I believe this is not the case. Love does not exclude discipline, as He clearly demonstrates. For my part, I find it difficult enough to understand my own spiritual state. I try to avoid judging the spiritual state of others.	There does not seem to be a consistent rule regarding the "spiritual state" of my political opposites. I have found both atheists and Christians of strong faith on strangely similar sides of political issues. It would be easy to (mis) characterize such as "progressive-atheists", but that not my experience. I do think that the path different people take to such mistaken beliefs also differs widely. Atheists tend to use secular-progressive reasoning to conclude that "government can make us better" while strong Christians seem to interpret Gods command to love one another and His imprecation to not judge one another as combining to call for completely accepting all behavior uncritically. I believe this is not the case. Love does not exclude discipline, as He clearly demonstrates. For my part, I find it difficult enough to understand my own spiritual state. I try to avoid judging the spiritual state of others.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	Not my place to make a sweeping generalization	
Participant 13B	I don't think we can necessarily judge someone's spiritual state based on how they vote, but I think it's fair to question someone who votes in a manner that contradicts commonly held beliefs	
Participant 14B	Not for me to judge.	
Participant 15B	I can not judge their spiritual state. I have dear Christian friends, mature in their faith, intelligent and well read who voted differently than me in recent years. I love them and will not lose a friendship over politics. When it comes to being vaccinated, if a political position is preventing that, I will go to the mat with them to explain the wisdom of becoming full vaccinated and my Biblical view (our responsibility to others) that informs my position of vaccines.	
Participant 16B	It depends on their own beliefs, and if I'm aware of those if it's people I interact with.	
Participant 17B	Generally poor for those who use Christianity to justify their vote.	
Participant 18B	I think they mean well, but may be misinformed or deformed deceived respectfully	
Participant 19B	Different faith/ God or Gods and thinking	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		They can be spiritual as long as you hear the full story about them and do not assume.
Participant 13C*		Idk I don't know them, their relationship with God is: a. not my problem b. not my business
Participant 14C		I do not have the right to judge them
Participant 15C*		They're all hopelessly fallen and blind (lol, kidding!). "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ," and that includes Christians who vote differently than I do. (I don't always feel this, but I want to, to extend grace & mercy in disagreement).
Participant 16C		Don't think there is inherently a connection
Participant 17C		Understanding as they generally reflect most beliefs I previously held, however some are simply bitter, angry, and more motivated by hate than genuine principle and for those I believe they are at best spiritually confused and at worst spiritually dead.

#18/#22 How should Christians behave when addressing political issues and disagreements?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	Christians should always respond in love. Be respectful and listen but stand for truth.	I think Christians should have compassion and respect.
Participant 2A	Christians should above all be respectful of others and their opinions. It is okay to disagree and have discussions about it so long as everyone's opinions and thoughts are being respected	Attempt to come at the situation with love at the center. Truly seeking what is best for society and the church
Participant 3A	With discernment, love, and understanding. I also think Christians should be educated on topics before formulating and defending opinions.	With dignity and respect
Participant 4A	See 1 Corinthians 13.	With curiosity and genuine desire to understand the other person's perspective
Participant 5A	Respectfully without hatred or violence	With love, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc.
Participant 6A	Always with love and trying to understand their views.	We should always be loving and respectful.
Participant 7A	When addressing political issues and disagreements, we should speak the truth in love.	Speak the truth in love.
Participant 8A	Polite, truthful, knowledgeable, factual, stern when necessary, active, serious, faith-building where possible, persistent, patient, demonstrate faith and love.	Polite, truthful, knowledgeable, factual, stern when necessary, active, serious, faith-building where possible, persistent, patient, demonstrating faith and love.
Participant 9A	Like Christ- gentle and humble in heart.	We should be like Christ.
Participant 10A	Listen carefully. Speak thoughtfully, truthfully and considerately. Know when to be quiet and when to speak up. This is difficult!	I think that there is strength in speaking quietly with consistency in holding true to a faith based approach. It also involves not being afraid to engage others in discussion - which involves listening as well as speaking but always speaking truth without compromising that.
Participant 11A	Respectively, considerately, and with an open, but not ignorant, mind. Truly evil people are very, very rare. The brothers and sisters that God has given me generally say things because they think I should hear those things. It is enough for me to practice my listening in proportion to my two ears and one mouth (still lots of practice needed).	We should treat others respectively, considerately, and with an open, but not ignorant, mind. Truly evil people are very, very rare. The brothers and sisters that God has given me generally say things because they think I should hear those things. It is enough for me to practice my listening in proportion to my two ears and one mouth (still lots of practice needed). However, this does not mean that "good intentions" should decide issues when history clearly illuminates consequences.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	with civility and love, prayerfully	
Participant 13B	From a compassionate, loving position, with a willingness to actually listen to the differing side	
Participant 14B	Thoughtfully and with respect for the other person's humanity	
Participant 15B	Listen to each other and not be confrontational	
Participant 16B	Be loving and kind, but honest.	
Participant 17B	Remove the plank from your own eye.	
Participant 18B	Respectfully looking out for each other	
Participant 19B	Camly and lovingly	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		Csmly and with a strong but loving argument.
Participant 13C*		be nice ab it and kind.
Participant 14C		respectfully discuss different ideas. Never judge them or resort to name calling which I have seen.
Participant 15C*		With grace & kindness, as well as boldness. "Innocent as doves and as cunning (?) as snakes" - cunning isn't the right word, but that's the idea. Sometimes we very much need to take a stand for what's right, but we need to do it without destroying the "other side's" dignity and humanity.
Participant 16C		respectfully, seeking to listen, willing to point out falsehood, loving and seeking the best for each other
Participant 17C		They should be most critical of themselves. I find that disarms almost all motivation I have to advocate for my beliefs publicly.

#19/#23 What is your impression and/or understanding of concepts like "human flourishing" and "the common good"?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	I'm not familiar with these concepts.	I think I have a better understanding of the common good now. Working towards the good that God intended for us all.
Participant 2A	"Human flourishing" and "the common good" both generally mean that it will benefit everyone in the community it effects.	God designed humans to flourish when following his guidelines. Often the common good comes about when we follow God
Participant 3A	I do think that the common good is important.	They are important
Participant 4A	While a great aspiration, government policies cannot solve the problems in this world. And we'll never get anyone to agree.	Human flourishing and common good mean considering others needs and not just your own
Participant 5A	This is a concept where one seeks the policies that create the most good for the most people. It can be good, but protecting the vulnerable requires this is ignored in those cases.	This means not being selfish in voting, but vote objectively for the good of the group.
Participant 6A	It depends on the issue. There are some lines that shouldn't be crossed for the common good.	My understanding of that concept is that it is tricky. The world is dictating how we should feel about an issue and Christians want to be loving and not hateful, so we are being pressured to not speak the truth because we are told that we are hateful when we do. We need to speak the truth in love and not appease the world by letting the world silence the truth that we have to give.
Participant 7A	While these concepts appear wholesome at first glance, I suspect that the concepts of 'human flourishing' and the 'common good' are words to try to convince us that the government should redistribute wealth by taking money from wealthy people and giving it to poor people (stealing??) rather than having people voluntarily contribute money to help others through charities or the church. I fear that the concepts of human flourishing and common good will be used to promote socialism and I don't believe socialism is biblical because the Bible says "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver". While our government and society are not perfect, I don't think socialism is the answer. When the Bible talks about sharing resources, I have only seen it in relation to people within the church. Similarly, I suspect that these concepts may be used to imply that certain races should give up privileges so that people of other races can have those privileges. While there may be a need to help out people who lack resources, this should be based on need, not race.	Having not only basic needs met, but opportunities in life, a sense of community, health, a relationship with God.
Participant 8A	Human Flourishing would be near to the Christian Founding Father's description in the Declaration of Independence: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.	Human Flourishing would be near to the Christian Founding Father's description in the Declaration of Independence: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, their vast wisdom passed along us, and examples of biblical behavior.
Participant 9A	I think these are both the end points to what the political process strives. It's the answer to why someone believes such and such law or policy will work.... taxing the rich? taxing corporations? cutting taxes? Every politician has "the answer" on how to increase human flourishing or benefit the common good. Again- always complex issues!!	These are concepts that believers should advocate for, as God is working to restore all things.
Participant 10A	In some regards, I think these can be dangerous terms as they can be interpreted in many ways. They are difficult to measure and can be quite subjective.Does "common good" mean equality for all, equity for all? Does common mean every single person or does it mean for the society generally? One definition of flourishing that I like is, "when people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time," living "within an optimal range of human functioning."	If human flourishing is the reaching of our best potential as God designed it, that is a good thing. But too often the focus is on a state of existence - quantity of goods as determined by others in a society who decide what we all have a right too. This focuses on what each individual should be provided with as opposed to individual responsibility and access to opportunity. "He who will not work shall not eat."
Participant 11A	As with so many of these superficially beneficent urges, our intent to promote these often slips into an attempt to force others to bend their will to ours. This never ends well. I believe we should allow others to "flourish" and attain "good"; that we should remove simple obstacles to a fair environment for others to seek to attain these, but am not fond of the misuse of these terms to promote authoritarianism.	As with so many of these superficially beneficent urges, our intent to promote these concepts often slips into an attempt to force others to bend their will to ours. This never ends well. I believe we should allow others to "flourish" and attain "good"; that we should remove simple obstacles to a fair environment for others to seek to attain these, but am not fond of the misuse of these terms to promote authoritarianism. The phrase "promote the general welfare" has been used as the justification for numerous destructive and evil policies, these concepts should be seen with a critical eye and avoided as easily misused when employed by governing bodies.
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	seeking a world that seeks a wholeness and betterment for all	
Participant 13B	In general, I think they're a good thing, but it's easy to take something so vague and morph it to fit any worldview. It feels to me like "common good" is often used to push "liberal" views like making abortion easier, but I could see it being used the opposite way, as well, to encourage an oppressive policy	
Participant 14B	This feels too big to put in a little text box. Sorry to break your survey!	
Participant 15B	I am uncertain. However, I believe that social justice is important for the common good. Some should not flourish at the peril of others. When we lift each other up, we are all lifted up.	
Participant 16B	Policies that benefit the majority.	
Participant 17B	The concepts are well aligned with Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, and that is morally good.	
Participant 18B	Looking out for each other	
Participant 19B	My impression is that it should be talked about and discussed	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		My impression is that I think it's good to talk about and good to put in perspective when talking about politics in just the world itself.
Participant 13C*		Human flourishing will happen when everybody is a Christian and everybody like Taylor Swift.
Participant 14C		As we've always been taught, we are our brother's keeper and should always be looking out for our brother and the good of all. If we do, there will be human flourishing.
Participant 15C*		I think we need a richer understanding of them in our highly individualized culture!! We've equated flourishing too much with economic/material prosperity and individual achievement, and lost the care & concern & presence with our neighbors.
Participant 16C		something i've only become familiar with in the last year or so. i think one of the most helpful parts of scripture is where the Bible says God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Recognizing that all are made in God's image and I should want that image to flourish - but also, realizing that my definition of flourishing is probably distroted/corrupted
Participant 17C		Good ideals for assisting with decision making, however I believe they are idealistic and ultimately unachievable in the long run.

#20/#24 Is there anything else you would like to add about your faith-based political engagement?		
(Matching)	**Pre-Series**	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A		Related to what I stated earlier, I also want to mention the danger of using labels on people or organizations. Just like I don't want people to make assumptions about me because I'm an evangelical Christian, I don't want to make assumptions about others base on whatever label I put on them.
Participant 2A		
Participant 3A		
Participant 4A	I think as a church, we need to be careful to not get too caught up in political discourse. Our one commonality is our love for Jesus. Not our political leanings.	
Participant 5A	No	No
Participant 6A	Prayer should be made a priority before engaging with others politically. I've learned the hard way.	I have been challenged to lovingly and respectfully listen to the views of others and to try to understand the biblical perspective of their views. This has benefitted me the most; to change my attitude toward those who disagree with me.
Participant 7A	If we (the church) focus on the word of God, understanding its meaning based on what it meant at the time that it was written, we will be able to make better political decisions as we increase our knowledge. As we share Christ with others and they also learn more, they will also be able to make better political decisions. Let's focus on God's word and let God take it from there.	No.
Participant 8A	Beware those who parrot the incorrect sentiment: We mustn't judge others. Also: Money is the root of all evil. And the philosophy that our Founding Fathers could not understand nor foresee new technologies and so those are not covered by the Bill of Rights.	Beware those who parrot the incorrect sentiment: We mustn't judge others. Also: Money is the root of all evil. And also the philosophy that our Founding Fathers could not understand nor foresee new technologies and so those are not covered by the Bill of Rights. I would recommend again, the many sources listed earlier in the questionnaire.
Participant 9A	I think it's only very recently- maybe the last 5 years, that I have begun to appreciate how complex the political issues and human challenges we face are. i continue to try to move away from pat answers or simple solutions- and learn to appreciate the whole issue.	God has given us much freedom in how we work to build his Kingdom. I don't think Christians need to be lumped categorically in how we approach a problem, and/or solution.
Participant 10A		I struggle to find the balance between advocating for individual responsibility in obeying the will of God and loving others and at times appearing heartless because I expect others to be as self-supporting as they can be. I try to let my actions speak louder than my words in consistently serving others, especially those with less abilities or access to resources. "Faith without works is dead."
Participant 11A	Someone (Mark Twain, I think) wrote something that I believe is still true, will always be true: "Mankind's circumstances have advanced, but Man himself has not". The result is that human beings are still fallen creatures, not to be trusted with much power. God alone should wield power over us, we should avoid the impulse.	
(Non-Matching)	**Pre-Series**	
Participant 12B	no	
Participant 13B		
Participant 14B		
Participant 15B	During this past election I sorted through several issues, some that I held dearly and wanted to vote based on those issues. Little by little, like a covered wagon going west, I had to toss out some values and issues that I normally would have considered very important in favor of climate change and stewardship of the earth. In this past election that had to be my priority. Our lack of stewardship of this earth will prevent any "human flourishing." It had to be my main issue. All others rest on whether we are successful or fail in this endeavor. Candidates who ignore climate change do so at the peril of ALL of us. It is science, not opinion that our earth will be unsustainable if we don't make changes fast.	
Participant 16B		
Participant 17B	Jesus wouldn't endorse or associate with your political party.	
Participant 18B	No	
Participant 19B	No	
		Post-Series
Participant 12C		No not really
Participant 13C*		No thank you.
Participant 14C		no
Participant 15C*		Where to begin! I've loved diving into it. More on that in the next question.
Participant 16C		There has been a big shift in the last several years and I think this series really helped to crystallize some of the points.
Participant 17C		No.

NA/#25 Is there any part of the series and class you especially appreciated, disliked, or would recommend changing? Please explain.	
(Matching)	**Post-Series**
Participant 1A	I enjoyed the discussions in Christian Ed. That people with different perspectives could freely share without judgement. We all listen to each other.
Participant 2A	I really enjoyed the two sermons where you talked about seeing even those you disagree with as children of God and the "understanding and wisdom" sermon.
Participant 3A	I really liked the fact that it was brought up, despite some people maybe not being comfortable with it
Participant 4A	I think Helping the Needy and Love Your Neighbor were especially helpful. These two messages explained really how we ought to treat others. Also Understanding and Wisdom really emphasized seeking guidance because things are complex and the answers aren't easy. Finally, the concluding sermon was especially encouraging because it basically pointed the ultimate end state and how we can be confident that God is going to make all things new! So we shouldn't give up trying to make some kind of difference.
Participant 5A	No
Participant 6A	I felt there was much more of an emphasis on getting us to change our point of view on the social justice issues (which I think we need to do), and not enough emphasis on abortion. In my opinion there should be as much outrage about the killing of babies as the killing of a black man my police. Both wrong and horrific.
Participant 7A	There was an opportunity for true discussion at the Christian Ed times. That was good. People started to finally feel comfortable speaking about their beliefs by the end. Please don't refer to January 6th as an insurrection. If Trump supporters really wanted an insurrection, they would have brought guns and had one. Regarding Christians being present there, prayers being said, and the 'Christian' flag being brought into the Capitol building, there were many people who thought the doors had been opened and respectfully walked in, carefully walking in the middle of the hallways as if they were typical tourists. There were also some people who were not there to be peaceful or who got carried away. There were a variety of people there at the time. In your sermon on Romans 13, you left out the following verses both times you quoted the scripture: "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended." These verses seem to indicate that it is GOOD governments that are being referred to when we are told in verse 2 not to rebel against the authority that God has instituted. The sermon said that we should accept the authority of God-given government by compliance or resistance. Also, that subjection may or may not include obedience. This is very confusing, as accepting or being subjected to authority seems to indicate compliance, not resistance. This is further clarified by saying that humble, respectful disobedience is OK, but it is still confusing. I agree that we are ultimately to be submissive to God.
Participant 8A	Our form of self -government requires moral character, knowledge, and wisdom. Christian voter guides are not anathema to Bible believing political involvement. Did not necessarily finish the series with a feeling of flourishing.
Participant 9A	I very much appreciated the discussions- I think these were worthy concepts to flesh out a bit. I like the FLOURISH acronym- it does help me remember the different facets of how i am built to respond to and engage in politics.
Participant 10A	I appreciated the organization of the series with the mnemonic of FLOURISH and the Christian Education hour discussion, especially the willingness of the regular group of attenders to openly and respectfully share their thoughts and ideas. It was helpful that we appeared to develop a small group or kind of a focus group (not by design?) which allowed for the development of trust between the group members and a richer discussion.
Participant 11A	Someone (Mark Twain, I think) wrote something that I believe is still true, will always be true: "Mankind's circumstances have advanced, but Man himself has not". The result is that human beings are still fallen creatures, not to be trusted with much power. God alone should wield power over us. We should avoid the impulse and be wary of others who attempt to use such power.
(Non-Matching)	**Post-Series**
Participant 12C	The Image of God: appreciated Faith not Fear: Appreciated and the Speak Prophetically: appreciated
Participant 13C*	it was good, I liked it. Although, you could've made the letters a little more colorful because no offense but green is not a good color.
Participant 14C	I struggled with every sermon to figure out where the "politics" was. I had to tune into the class discussion to get the connection. As someone mentioned, it probably would have been good to define "politics" up front so we could make the connections with each sermon. It almost seemed like you were being overly cautious, not wanting to bring up political differences or how to specifically have politically-based conversations in such a public platform.
Participant 15C*	I *loved* the space to come together with people of a variety of perspectives and talk about how we understand all of these political concepts. I loved that the discussion was honest, thoughtful, not just an echo chamber, and centered in Scripture. Despite spending 10 weeks on it, I never felt like there was enough time to do each week's topic justice - I wanted to learn and discuss and dive deeper every week. For the introverts in the room (not me!) I would have loved a way to hear more of what they were thinking. Maybe that could have been through one-on-one discussions or providing other ways of contributing (writing, maybe? or some polls or using the chat feature on Zoom or something) or something, but the quietest ones are often thinking the most about it, and I would have liked to hear more from them (without anyone feeling put on the spot). I hope we get to have more conversations like these in the future! Thank you for leading them, Jonathan.
Participant 16C	Appreciated Jonathan's willingness to listen and hear different perspectives and to take a big risk with this series.
Participant 17C	The series lacked some tactical substance. Addressing specific issues with some level of conviction and practical application of the faith-based framework would've been more impactful, memorable, and practically useful even if listeners did not fully agree with the conclusion.

APPENDIX D:

SERMON LINKS

You can copy and paste the following links to access my sermons and sermon videos.

#1 A Vision of Flourishing

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/_9f0O5XtK1I
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/a-vision-of-flourishing-genesis-1-3-faith-politics-sermon-series/

#2 F - Faith, Not Fear

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/RH1jizdWhYg
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/faith-not-fear-matthew-5-7-jesus-political-manifesto-sermon-on-the-mount/

#3 L - Love God & Neighbor

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/5nOCpBe7SOU
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/love-god-neighbor-even-political-enemies-matthew-2235-40/

#4 O - Other Peoples' Good

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/R74X74WCOWg
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/o-other-peoples-good-genesis-128-jeremiah-294-7-acts-242-47/

#5 U - Understanding & Wisdom

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/WWaakzSY7x8

- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/u-understanding-wisdom-proverbs-815-17-james-313-18/

#6 R - Reign of Christ

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/d0bbQ2Swx5s
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/part-6-r-reign-of-christ-romans-131-7-philippians-320-21/

#7 I - Image of God

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/4XwRaIuxJ_U
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/part-7-i-image-of-god-imago-dei-mark-1213-17/

#8 S - Speak Prophetically

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/i3u9y9Ay7UU
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/part-8-s-speak-prophetically-amos-521-24/

#9 H - Help the Needy

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/MP5iirqQMfo
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/part-9-h-help-the-needy-zechariah-78-12-matthew-2531-46/

#10 A Flourishing Future

- YouTube: https://youtu.be/d2qQR3HIwWU
- Manuscript: https://www.cornerstonewestford.com/sermons/a-flourishing-future-revelation-211-6-221-5/

Small Town Summits Article

In addition, I wrote a reflection for *Small Town Summits* upon completion of the sermon series.

- Article: https://www.smalltownsummits.com/archives-2/2021/12/30/the-heart-of-political-discipleship-in-small-churches
- YouTube: https://youtu.be/LnOR_5SY9Wg

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- Master of Divinity (M.Div) – May 2013

Colorado State University (CSU) – Fort Collins, CO

- Bachelor of Science in Business Administration: Concentration in Finance – May 2009

Aims Community College, Greeley, CO

- Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts – December 2006

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE:

Pastor of Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA October 2015 – June 2022

Associate Pastor of Immanuel Church in Chelmsford, MA July 2013 – July 2017

Gordon-Conwell Mentored Ministry

- Youth Ministries Intern at First Baptist Church in Reading, MA 2012
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AWARDS & ACTIVITIES:

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